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A TRIBUTE TO SYSTEM 3

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THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S THE FIRST CAPCOM GAME YOU'LL PLAY ON THE EVERCADE EXP?

DARRAN JONES

It's obviously going to be *Strider*. Hopefully it will have the later ROM edition with different music on each level.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Spider-Man Remastered*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Final Fight – I never did complete it in the arcades despite spending nearly a fiver on it one time.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Neon Abyss*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

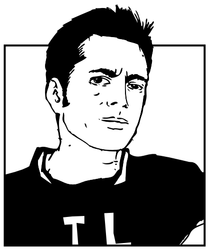
I'm lucky enough to know for sure – I played *Mercs* because I wanted to test out the Tate mode.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Sega Rally*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Probably *Breath Of Fire* as I've always liked JRPGs.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.

PAUL DRURY

I think it'll have to be *Strider* to finally find out what Darran has been banging on about all these years…
Expertise: Tracking down Atari veterans
Currently playing: *Ultra Tank*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

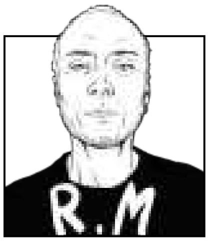


IAIN LEE

I am a sucker for *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. Every time I pick up a retro machine, I always check to see if it's there.
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: *Fall Guys* with the kids
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

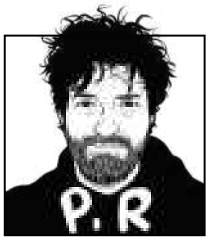
ANDREW FISHER

Vulgus, the vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up in Tate mode as it was Capcom's first game.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Yokai Monk* (ZX Spectrum)
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*



RORY MILNE

My first choice would be *Bionic Commando*. Partly because I loved the Spectrum version, but also because who wouldn't want a multi-purpose extending arm!
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Sabre Wulf*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*



PAUL ROSE

Strider for me. It's an all-time arcade classic.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Sneaky Sasquatch*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

LOADING...

Few modern systems have captured the spirit of collecting like Blaze Entertainment's Evercade series with its bespoke cartridge range that covers both arcade and console classics. After debuting an impressive VS home console last year, the company is back with a brand-new handheld device that not only features a new Tate mode option, but also, somewhat controversially, replaces the original Evercade handheld and marks the first time the publisher has released a collection of games that don't come on a physical cart.

Nick has not only spent time play-testing the new machine, but was also able to quiz the Evercade team on what's planned for the future, the introduction of home-computer cartridges and whether the Capcom collection will become the exception rather than the norm.

Other highlights of our current issue include a look at the hit strategy sequel, *Heroes Of Might & Magic II*, the constant evolution of the *Arkanoid* series and a look at the games of System 3 with input from its founder Mark Cale. We also speak to Toshihiro Kondo about creating *Trails In The Sky*, chat to Dave Grossman and Ron Gilbert about returning to *Monkey Island* and speak to other Lucasfilm Games alumni about the creation of the graphic adventure version of *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*.

Oh, and we've a fantastic subs offer on page 28, so make sure you check it out.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

retro GAMER
EVERCADE EXP

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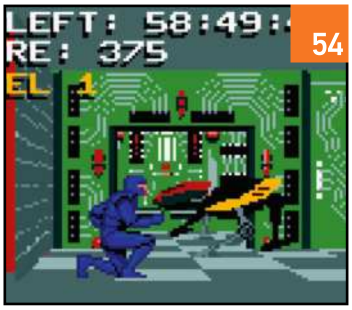
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Retro Inspired: Return To Monkey Island

Dave Grossman and Ron Gilbert on bringing back the acclaimed series

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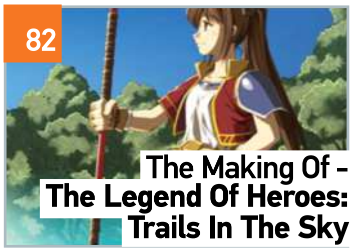

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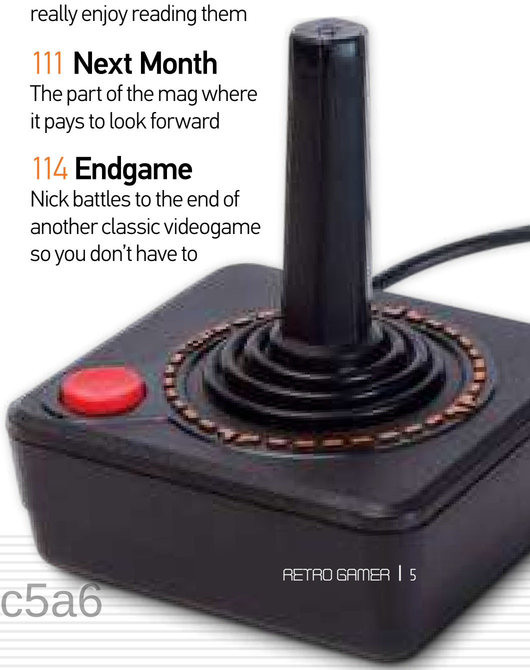

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HIGH SCORE
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The History Of: Arkanoid

Martyn Carroll looks back at Taito's classic series and learns about its new game

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

» [PC] Like customisation? You're in luck as the team is using a variety of different filters and scanline options for all its ports.

TOAPLAN SHOOTERS HEAD TO PC

Carl-Henrik Skårstedt on porting Toaplan's classic shmups

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Nick discovers a distinct lack of games in February 2006

Once upon a time, Toaplan was widely regarded as being one of the finest shmup developers in the business. Titles like *Tiger-Heli*, *Flying Shark* and *Truxton* helped set the standard for the developer and the genre in general and although Toaplan declared bankruptcy in 1994 its games certainly haven't been forgotten.

In more recent years Toaplan shooters have had something of a resurgence due to the vast majority of its IP being owned by Tatsujin, which was recently acquired by Embracer Group. M2 has been releasing various Toaplan games since 2020, while Mega Drive re-releases of *Truxton*, *Hellfire*, *Fire Shark* and *Zero Wing* have appeared courtesy of Retro-Bit. Hell, we've even had a Switch and PS4 update of *Snow Bros* and a couple of Toaplan shooters recently popped up on Sega's Astro City Mini V.

» [Arcade] Unofficially porting *Flying Shark* in the late-Nineties has led to Carl-Henrik officially porting Toaplan's shmups to PC.

It's now the turn of PC owners to receive some Toaplan shmup goodness and they're heading to the system courtesy of Swedish developer Bitwave Games, which was also recently acquired by Embracer Group. Carl-Henrik Skårstedt is behind the new ports, although this is his second crack at the games after he helped a friend unofficially emulate *Flying Shark* in the late-Nineties. "Together we got the game running, released it as the Shark Emulator and got an awesome reception from the community so we kept going adding more Toaplan games," he says.

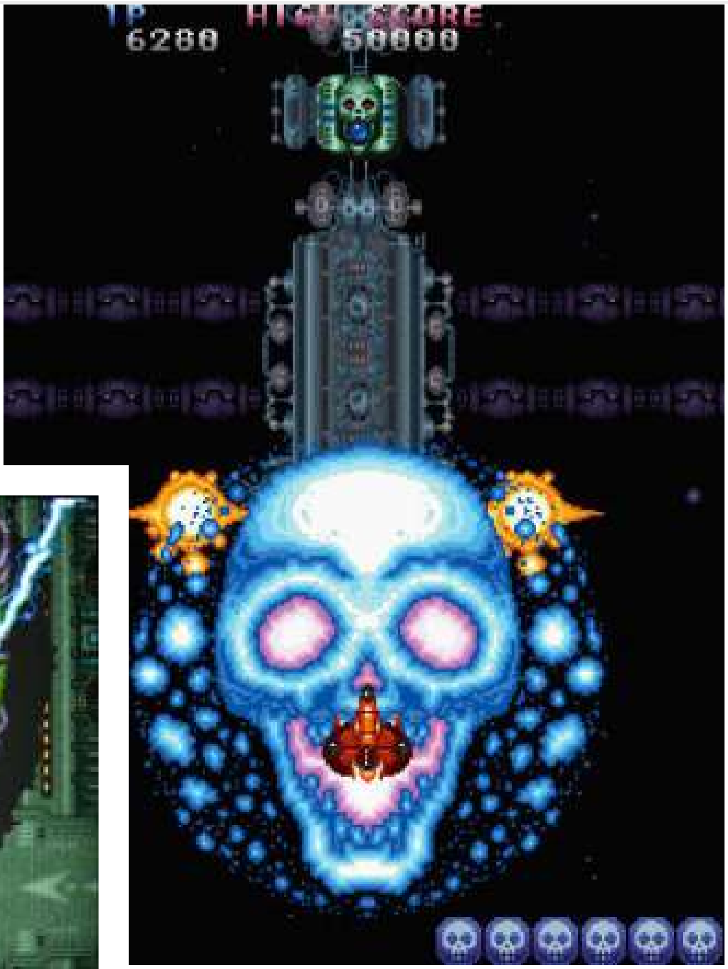
A conversation with Martin Lindell at Embracer Group about his experience emulating Toaplan games led to Martin sending Carl-Henrik the aforementioned Toaplan collection from Retro-Bit and a request to bring the games back to PCs in an official capacity. "All I had to do to get started was just to get the Shark emulator code running and start adding more features and a few more games."

» Carl-Henrik Skårstedt and Bitwave Games have big PC plans for Toaplan's shmups.

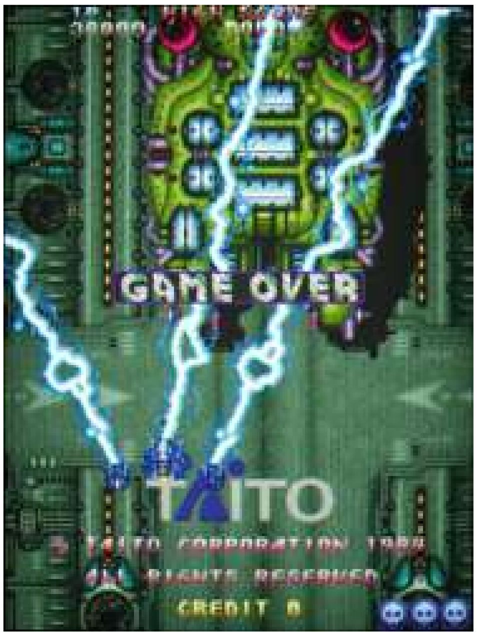
Toaplan's shooter library isn't the biggest, but it's largely quality and Bitwave Games has big plans for its PC releases. "We are working on [releasing] all 16 shoot-'em-up arcade games from Toaplan and are planning to release four at a time," confirms Carl-Henrik. "We have a preliminary list of all the releases but we're open to rearrange the list depending on what players want. If all goes well we could port the other Toaplan arcade games later."

Nowadays there's a lot of stiff competition revisiting classic

» [Arcade] "I think they are just some of the greatest shoot-'em-up games created, and each game is unique," says Carl-Henrik.



» [PC] Few smart bombs impress like the one found in *Truxton*.



» [PC] We like how authentic the CRT filter looks on games like *Truxton*.

games with Digital Eclipse and M2 being the current standard bearers for quality emulation, so what can we expect to see in the versions that Bitwave Games is working on? "Primarily we are trying to preserve as much of the games as possible but also add features that make it more convenient to play," explains Carl-Henrik, listing options like Achievements and leaderboards, the ability to play in a window, scanline simulation and numerous quality-of-life features like autofire, rewind options and quick saves and loads.

One thing we are looking forward to is the Replay mechanic that is planned as it sounds similar to Digital Eclipse's excellent Watch option that appears in many of its games. "Replays can be shared and you can take over play at any point, and you can also rewind to start the replay at an earlier time," explains Carl-Henrik about the cool addition.

Some of the more intriguing features the team are working on are the possibility of including regional versions of games like *Twin Cobra*/*Kyukyoku Tiger*, *Truxton*/*Tatsujin* and an easy mode for inexperienced players, but that's not the only thing Bitwave Games has planned, with Carl-Henrik saying they are working on "experimental features that optionally change the games as we feel confident about them and get approval to use them".

Although multiple versions are being considered we were told that, "We are focussed on the arcade versions and don't have plans for console ports." That last point is interesting as the console market is where M2 currently reigns supreme. The Japanese developer has already released a couple of Toaplan compilations with more planned. Carl-Henrik feels there's room in the market for both. "I think the M2 versions are very good, but we are making our own project that I hope will stand out in its own way."

Even with Carl-Henrik's expert knowledge of Toaplan's impressive back catalogue, porting the games to PC hasn't been without problems. "There are a lot of challenges creating any game on PC, such as how to handle a wide variety of controllers to a variety of monitor dimensions and computer power to consider," he admits. "As a contrast, working on the arcade hardware simulation is almost relaxing." *

» [PC] Bitwave Games' first four games are *Zero Wing* (pictured) *Truxton*, *Out Zone* and *Twin Cobra*.

GOLDENEYE 007 RETURNS

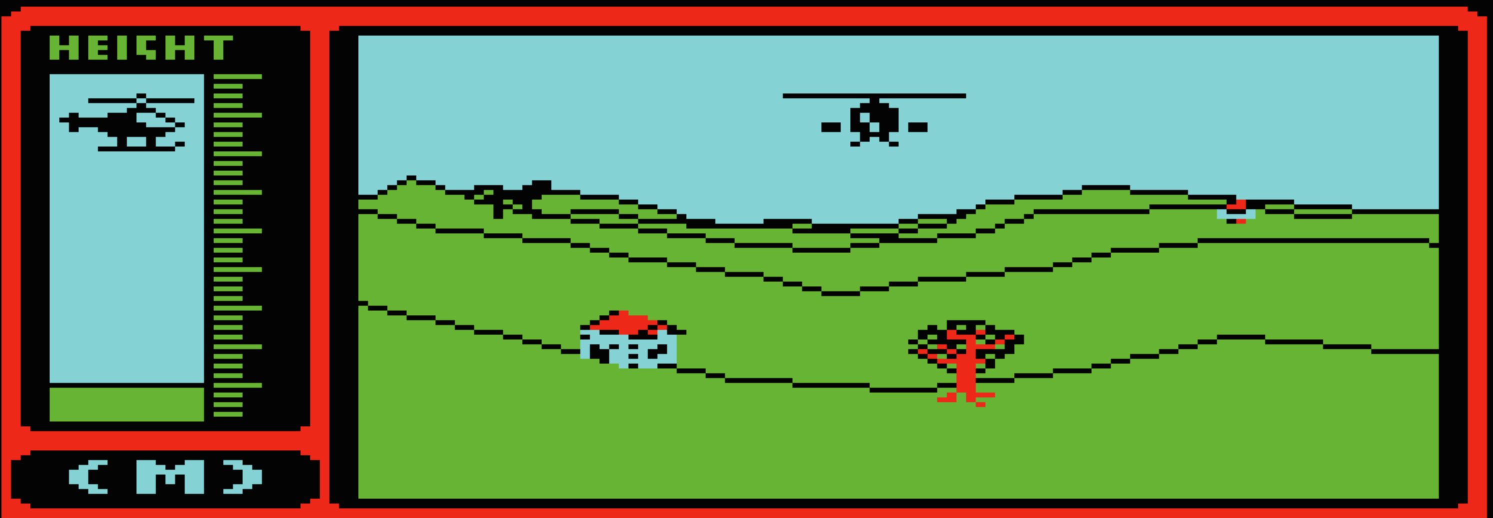
One of gaming's worst-kept secrets was finally revealed in Nintendo's September direct. Rare's legendary N64 game is heading to Switch and Xbox consoles and promises numerous upgrades over the original game. Interestingly, the Switch version has exclusive online play and neither version seems based on the Xbox 360 remaster that was leaked. The Switch version is part of Nintendo's online service, while the Xbox version is on Games Pass or free with digital copies of *Rare Replay*.

GOLDENEYE 007

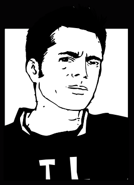
NINTENDO MOTHER LODE

GoldenEye wasn't the only big news out of Nintendo's September direct. In addition to announcing a new *Fire Emblem* game and the full title of next year's *Zelda* release (it's called *Tears Of The Kingdom*), Nintendo also announced several Wii remasters, including *Kirby's Return To Dream Land Deluxe* and *Fatal Frame: Mask Of The Lunar Eclipse* (pictured). In fact remasters and remakes were in fashion with *Front Missions 1-3* and *Story Of Seasons* also being announced at the direct.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine



Combat jinx



Growing up there were a few things I just didn't understand, and I thought it must be my fault. Everyone else loves these things. Perhaps I'm just too young to understand. Case in point – spaghetti Westerns. My dad would love them. My friends would love them. But at eight I found them so dull. Who cares about cowboys?

Every couple of years I'd go back, thinking that maybe it was my fault, and I was too young the first time around. I went back at ten. Then at 12. And finally at 15 I realised the films were simply not for me. I had understood them at eight, I just did not like them.

I had a few games that had a similar effect on me. For some reason, a really obscure and very weird game popped into my head. *Combat Lynx* on the BBC. I haven't thought of this for nearly 35 years. Suddenly, I'm driving home from work and it's all I can think of.

When *Combat Lynx* came out in 1985 it felt like a very grown-up game. It came in a big plastic box with a vinyl covering, kind of like when VHS videos first appeared. You controlled a helicopter. And that is all I can remember about the gameplay. You controlled a helicopter. It was an expensive title for the time and back then my pocket money wasn't enough to buy loads of games and parents were not as generous as we are now. So if you got a game, that had to last and you had to play it.

I was dead excited when I got *Combat Lynx* but very quickly it became apparent this game was beyond my ken. As the game was loading, I read the instructions. My boys laugh when I tell them we didn't have in-game tutorials and had to read what were quite often very thick booklets. Even after reading several dozen pages, I had absolutely no idea what to do. I could do a vertical take off and I could move forward. But what next? The grid references gave me a migraine. The compass was of absolutely zero use. As I write this, I'm watching someone play it on YouTube. There's combat! You get to fight! I never saw any combat!

So I gave up. I left it for six months thinking that maybe I just wasn't ready for it. When I came back six months later, I STILL didn't get it. Worse than that for any kid, IT WAS BORING. Cue me putting it away again.

A year later, I found it hidden in a wardrobe under a ton of stuff. Hey, I'm nearly 14 now. The perfect age to play this, understand it and enjoy it. Nah. Even at that wonderfully ancient age, I could still only take off, fly forward and then run out of petrol.

It's a life lesson I've finally learnt. I now know, if I don't like something the first time, ditch it immediately. *

> "Every couple of years I'd go back, thinking that maybe it was my fault, and I was too young the first time around"

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Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:
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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

An unreal PC experience

I haven't owned a PC in years. I'm strictly a Mac boy now, and have been for well over a decade. Yes, we can debate the pros and cons of being locked into the Apple ecosystem some other time. Yes, I seem to have to buy a new MacBook every couple of years. Yes, it isn't always the best system on which to play new games. Yes, Apple's cult-like corporate philosophy makes my teeth itch.

However, it's all still preferable to the sheer hell I experienced trying to play games on the PC during the Nineties. Without first-hand experience, it's my understanding that gaming on a PC is better these days. It's easier, more seamless… he says, with no implication of authority or first-hand experience.

But… I can speak of what it was like in the Nineties. Installing a new game felt like a crapshoot. You never knew whether it was going to work. You might go through an hour of swapping disks and running commands, and then… error. The game just wouldn't load.

Then there were the games that would load, present you with a tantalising menu screen, and then drop you back to the desktop once you selected New Game. The ones that would hit a game-breaking bug, or weren't compatible with your sound or graphics card, or would play at a rate of 1fps because you couldn't afford the latest hardware that the developers had in their office.

Nineties computer hardware was the tech equivalent of Frankenstein's Monster, assembled from disport parts. And at any moment an arm might drop off.

When a game did install, load, and play without issue – I remember 1999's *Urban Chaos* and *Half-Life* as two particularly smooth, glitch-free, experiences – it was euphoric. It almost became part of the game experience.

The absolute low point of PC gaming for me was 1998's *Unreal* – the game which begat not only a series, but the famous Unreal Engine. Today, it is not only used in countless modern games, but as a movie special-effects tool.

> "Nineties computer hardware was the tech equivalent of Frankenstein's Monster"

Back then, it killed my PC outright. As in: bricked it. Though I'd been confident my PC had been sufficiently upgraded to run the cutting-edge game, something about the combination of drivers and graphics card and RAM I'd installed reacted badly with the software. I couldn't even boot the computer to the desktop. I tried everything, and eventually tried to get it repaired, but even they threw up their hands in despair.

The game cost a grand's worth of hardware. I mean, when I did get it running on the new PC with no issue whatsoever, it was very pretty, and lots of fun, but my days as a member of the PC Master Race were numbered. Once I stopped writing *Digitiser*, and no longer had to review PC games as part of my job, I fell into the waiting, quinoa-scented, embrace of Steve Jobs. Unreal! *

Many thanks to GOG.com for supplying us with *Unreal Gold*.

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN

URGENT APPEAL

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

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Born out of the Balkans conflict 30 years ago, we've championed the vital importance of family and community-based care of children and our teams are on the ground in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to ensure this war does not rob children of the love and protection they need now more than ever. Across all three countries, we're directly supporting displaced families and unaccompanied children with material and emotional support. We're working closely with authorities to keep families together when they are at their most vulnerable and to fight for the safe tracking, monitoring and care for children without parental care. And we won't stop when the fighting stops.

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☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Maestro ☐ CAF card

Card no. ☐☐☐☐ - ☐☐☐☐ - ☐☐☐☐ - ☐☐☐☐ - ☐☐ (Maestro only)

Start date ☐☐☐☐ Expiry date ☐☐☐☐ Issue no. ☐☐ (Maestro only) Security no. ☐☐☐ (on signature strip)

Signature

Date

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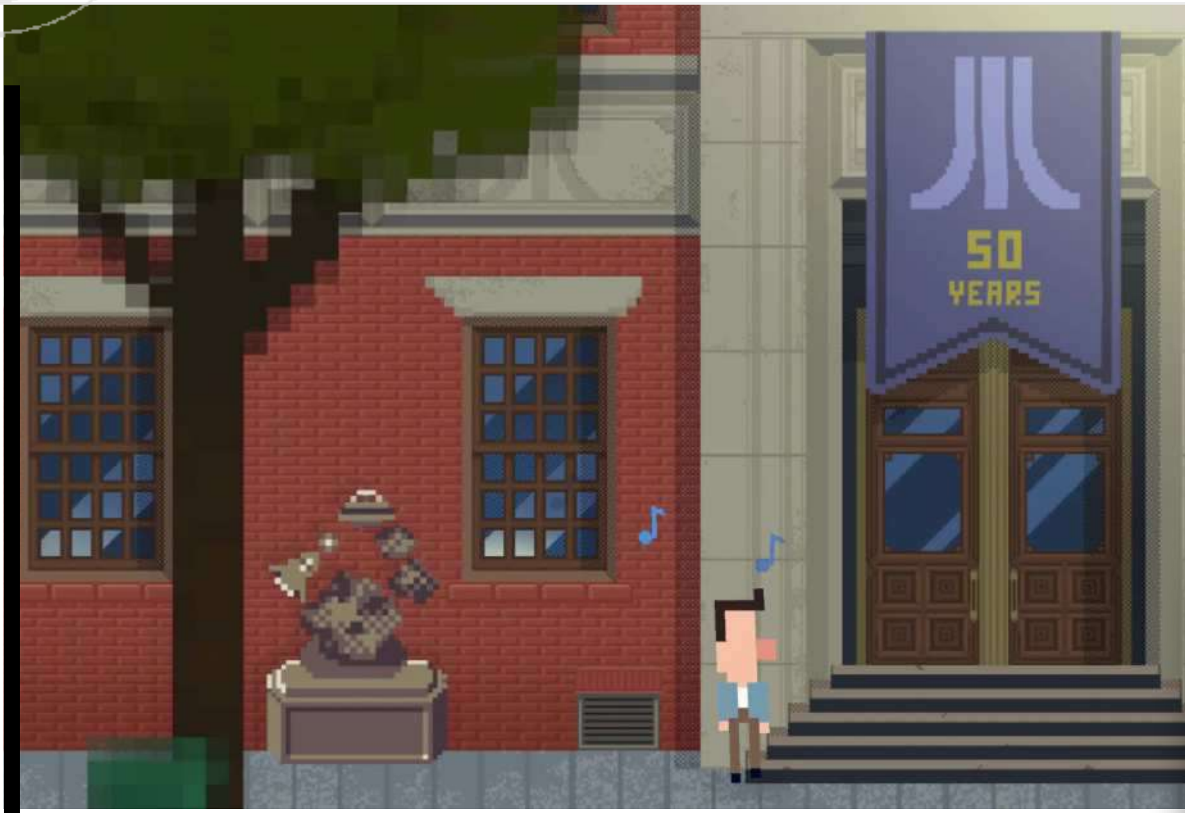


» Mark Perloff is a producer at Atari and has high hopes for *Atari Mania*.

Atari Mania

Producer Mark Perloff tells us about Atari's new microgame-themed release

Atari turned 50 this year and it has been celebrating with a number of games, including its entertaining *Recharged* series and the incoming compilation *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*. The latest game to drop, *Atari Mania*, is not only inspired by Nintendo's *WarioWare* series, but also mashes together popular Atari games like *Pong*, *Breakout* and *Centipede*. We spoke to producer Mark Perloff to find out more.

Where did the idea for *Atari Mania* originate?

Our model is to work with independent studios. Sometimes we ask the studios to give us ideas for specific games, but more often we ask studios to pitch us ideas for games that they feel passionate about – games they really want to make. That is where the idea for *Atari Mania* came from. Illogika, a talented studio based out of Montreal, pitched us the concept of *Atari Mania* along with a few other ideas. The idea of a microgame collection based on our classic games popped off the screen when it was presented to us.

What was it that you liked about Illogika's pitch?

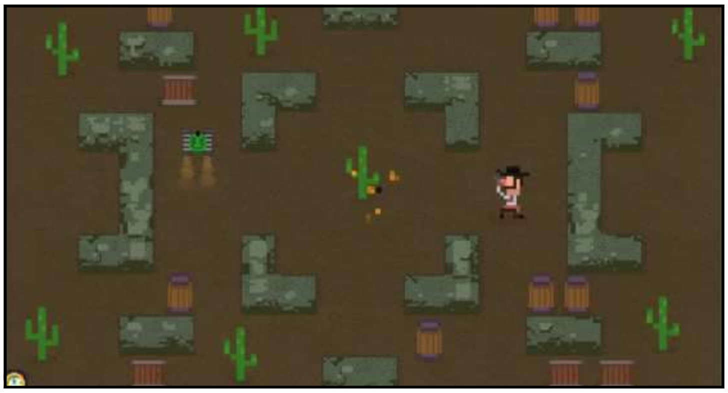
The idea resonated with our team for a number of reasons: we have so many memorable games and characters from the arcade and 2600 era, that bringing it all together in one game just made sense. The game format – which combines microgames with a narrative-driven adventure – was really compelling. We are celebrating Atari's 50th anniversary this year, so the timing for a game that celebrates so many of our games in this way was perfect timing.

What makes the Atari brand so good for this type of game?

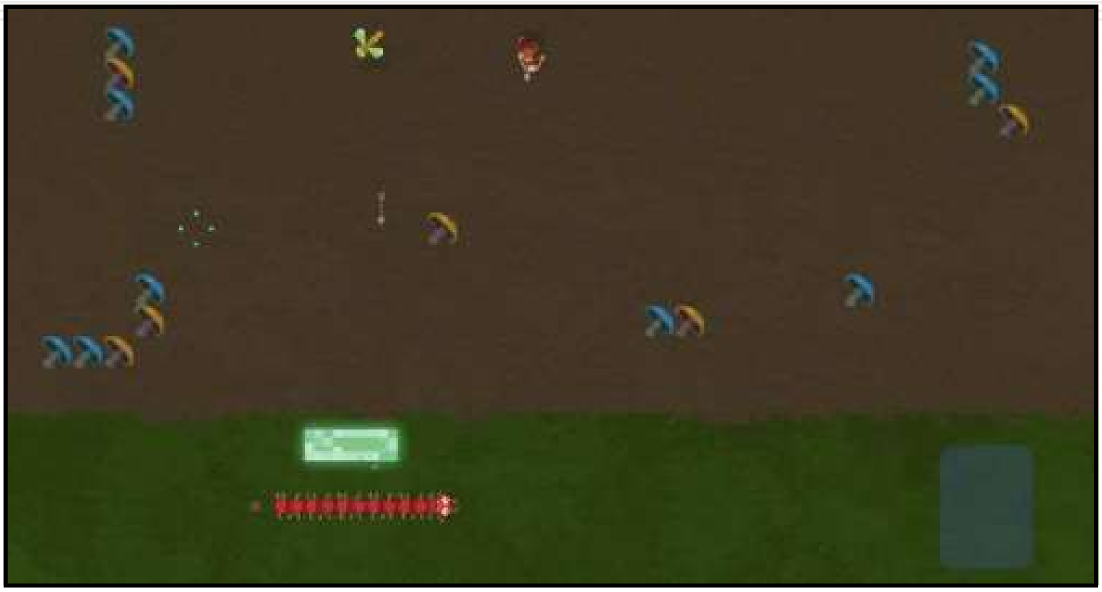
First of all, the Atari library is vast and features a number of indelible, foundational videogames so we had a lot of material to work from. That variety is important, it gives us a lot of genres and characters to work from, and we can avoid repetition as the game progresses. Also, most of those titles have pretty straightforward gameplay and controls (at least compared to modern games). That simplicity and elegance of design was essential, because it allowed us to layer multiple gameplay ideas on top of each other without feeling cluttered or convoluted.

The *WarioWare* series often uses graphics from older Nintendo games. Is there a reason why you didn't do something similar for *Atari Mania*?

The visual design of *Atari Mania* accomplished a few objectives for us: it set this title apart from pure emulations of classic Atari games and gave it its own visual identity. It also allowed the developers to put more personality into the world through animation and character design, because they were working from a toolkit with a cohesive look and feel. We think it hits a sweet spot of feeling retro,



» [PC] Mark hopes that there will be "moments of happy surprise and confusion", as players experience old classics in new ways.


» [PC] This level has you protecting Millipede from danger. Be careful, it's quite tricky.

while not being 100% beholden to the exact look of vintage Atari.

How did you settle on *Atari Mania*'s graphical style?
The art team at Illogika went through many style iterations that referenced different eras in gaming history, and the one we landed on just felt right. As mentioned, the look we chose gave us a ton of flexibility in how we animated the various heroes and enemies, while still capturing the retro *feel* we were going for.

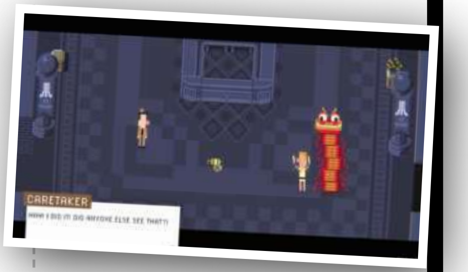
Why is there no multiplayer?
Beyond the microgames themselves, there is an 'overworld' that the player explores as they solve puzzles and work their way through the Atari Vault. This element, which was easier to execute as a single-player experience, was one consideration. From a purely technical perspective, focussing on single-player allowed us to spend more time building and balancing the microgames as opposed to ensuring the multiplayer functionality worked perfectly.

How many Atari games made it into the final game?
Atari Mania features 25 different games! We dug pretty deep into our catalogue, so along with the 'heavy hitters' like *Pong* and *Breakout* there are some fairly esoteric titles in there. We hope these will be fun trips down memory lane for some players, and new discoveries for others that introduce them to titles they did not know in a fun way. When's the last time you played *Demons To Diamonds*?

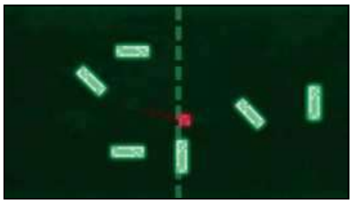
What's been the hardest challenge from a technical point of view?
Building an engine that could support the mechanics for 150 microgames based on such a wide collection of gameplay and control schemes presented a huge technical challenge to Illogika, and they crushed it.

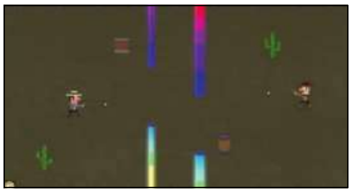
How difficult is it to create mash-ups between such distinctive and iconic games?
Some of the mash-ups came together pretty easily. For example, "What if you're deflecting *Pong* balls back at Millipede?" That was pretty straightforward. Others required more creative thinking, "What if you're a cactus, protecting Pete from Outlaw?" Our number-one goal was to make each microgame fun! As the project progressed, the dev team got more and more adventurous. I suspect that we will surprise players with some of the combos we've put together. *

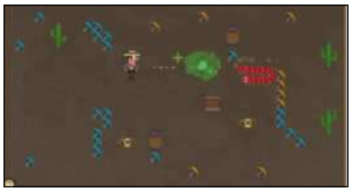
Illogika's *Atari Mania* is on sale now and is available for Switch, Steam, Epic Games Store and Atari VCS.

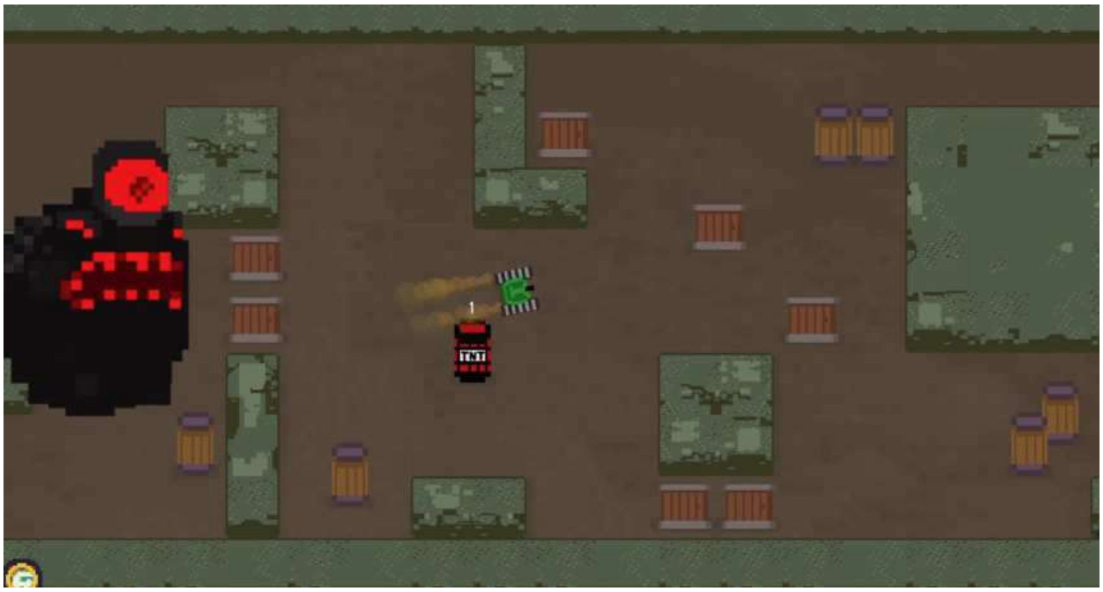


» [PC] There are numerous collectibles in *Atari Mania*. "You can reference them at any time to learn more about the games you're playing and the characters you're meeting," Mark says.


» [PC] Here's *Pong*, but as you've never seen it before.


» [PC] *Atari Mania* features 150 different microgames to enjoy and they cover a range of playing styles and genres.


» [PC] Illogika's game took roughly a year of development with a core team of ten staff.



» [PC] That fellow on the left pops up throughout *Atari Mania*'s story. Make sure you give him the slip.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

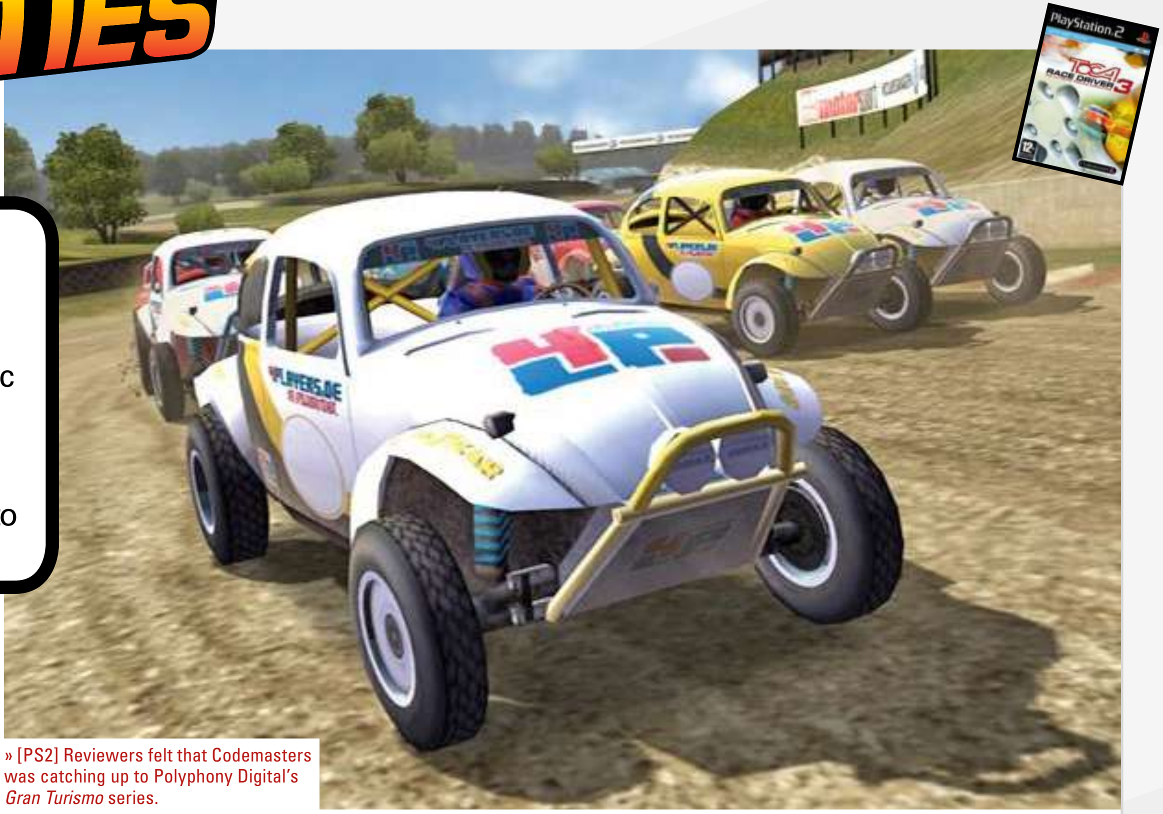
FEBRUARY 2006 – In the month of Valentine's Day, Japan is showing no love to a new console and there's precious little to get romantic about on the existing ones back home, but Nick Thorpe dutifully fires up the time machine to report on it all

NEWS FEBRUARY 2006

In an incident on 11 February, American vice president Dick Cheney shot 78-year-old attorney Harry Whittington during a hunting trip in Riviera, Texas. Cheney claimed to have turned to shoot at a bird that had flown behind him only to inadvertently hit Whittington, who had broken from the hunting line to search for a downed quail, in the face. The situation was widely ridiculed in American media.

On 14 February, the House Of Commons passed an amendment to the Health Bill which extended a proposed smoking ban to all pubs and private members clubs. Under the government's original plan, only pubs serving food would have been covered by the ban. The law came into force in July 2007, banning smoking in almost all indoor workplaces and communal areas of shared residential buildings.

Almost £53 million was stolen from a Securitas depot in Tonbridge, Kent on 21-22 February, in the UK's largest-ever cash robbery. The heist, by MMA fighter Lee Murray, involving a placing and inside man in the depot, kidnapping the manager and making armed threats after gaining access. Seven people were eventually jailed for the crime, but much of the cash was never recovered.



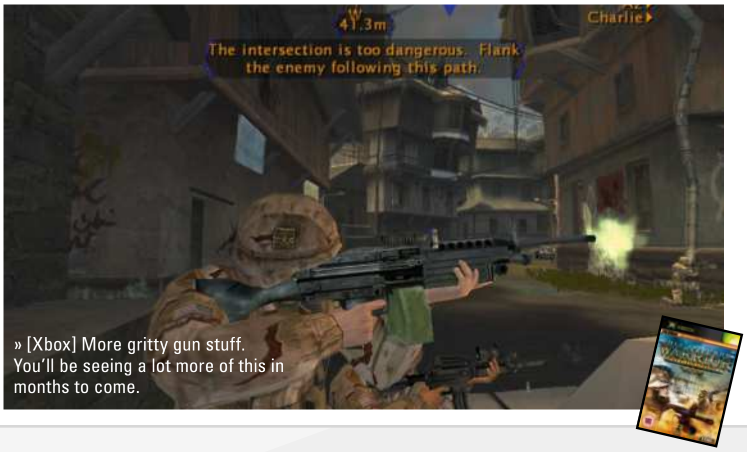
» [PS2] Reviewers felt that Codemasters was catching up to Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* series.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 2006

Could the Xbox 360 reverse the notoriously poor fortunes of its predecessor in Japan? Maybe not. *Edge* noted that Microsoft was "in the difficult situation of committing stock that would be a sure sell in the west to prove its commitment to an indifferent east", and noted that the virtual disappearance of the original machine and its software suggested that, "Microsoft may have accepted returns in order to win shelf space for the 360." According to *games™* just 28% of Xbox 360 consoles shipped to the country for the launch were sold – 62,000 units, just over half of the 123,000 that the first Xbox sold at launch.

Back at home, the best of the new releases was *TOCA: Race Driver 3*, out on PS2 and Xbox. The *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* review said that it was "arguably the only racer on PS2 that caters to sim fans, occasional thrill seekers and every grade of petrolhead passion in-between", awarding it 9/10. *Official Xbox Magazine* was similarly impressed, giving it a score of 9.2/10 for its "superb handling, incredible detail and lovely graphics". Also turning heads on the PS2 was *We Love Katamari*, which earned 8/10 from *Official PS2 Magazine*. As it was the first game in the series to make its way to the UK, the magazine explained that "all you do is roll a big ball around", but that this was "equally hilarious and captivating". Other notable games included a re-release of *Ico* (9/10 *Official PS2*, 89% *GamesMaster*), timed to tie in with *Shadow Of The Colossus*, farming RPG *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* (7/10 *OPS2*) and *Metal Slug 5* (7/10 *OPS2*.

The original Xbox was poorly supplied, as *Official Xbox Magazine* reviewed seven games this month. However, three heavily maligned SNK conversions never


41.3m
Charlie
The intersection is too dangerous. Flank the enemy following this path.

» [Xbox] More gritty gun stuff. You'll be seeing a lot more of this in months to come.

Hm? Use this time hole to rescue the princess?

» [DS] Luigi peers into the time hole, only to see his future self giving him a death stare.

actually made it to shelves, and *Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness* (7/10 *Official PS2*, 4.5/10 *OXM*) is so rare that you'd think the same was true. Exclusive of the month here was the modern warfare strategy sequel *Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers*, earning 9.0/10 as it was "not hugely different to the original" but "challenging and accessible".

The Xbox wasn't the only console suffering a drought, with the contents page of *360* meekly stating "Er, well… There are some games coming out in the next month or so. Honest…" in the entry for the review section. The GameCube release schedule was predictably barren and the PSP only received a couple of unremarkable PS2 conversions – *Peter Jackson's King Kong* (5/10, *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*) and *Prince Of Persia: Revelations* (6/10 *OPS2*, 5/10 *Edge*).

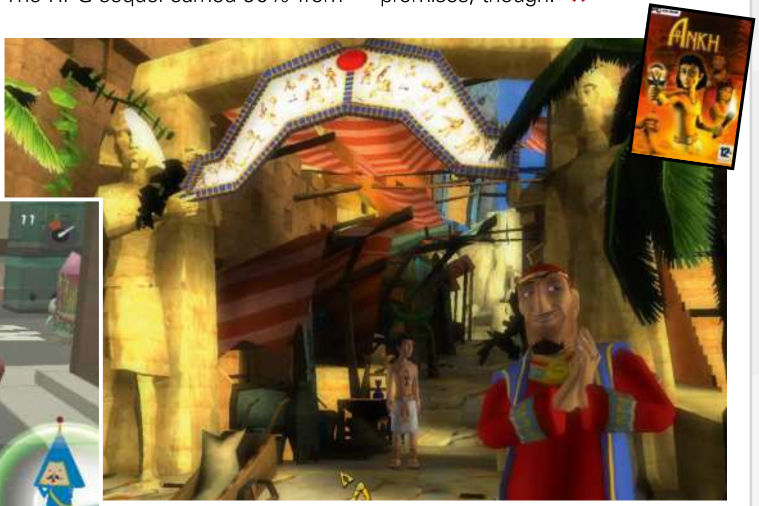
» [PS2] Everyone loved *Katamari*, they just didn't know it yet because we never got the original.

Nintendo's DS did have new games, but of the 11 UK releases reviewed by *NGC*, nine scored under 70% including a shocking version of *Burnout Legends* (44% *NGC*), though the card battle spinoff *Battles Of Prince Of Persia* just missed that mark at 69%. It was a divisive game – *Edge* gave it 5/10, feeling that it was "a hollow exercise in brand extension" and "amiable but unremarkable", while *games™* gave it 6/10. *GamesMaster* felt that it was a "first-rate strategy game" with "fine presentation, a decent storyline, nine playable characters and generous multiplayer modes", earning it 87%.

A stripped-back conversion of *Big Mutha Truckers* did just hit that 70% score from *NGC*, but the clear handheld game of the month was *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time*. The RPG sequel earned 90% from both *NGC* and *GamesMaster*, with the former saying that it was "not so much the mechanics of the game that make it so appealing", but "the personality and charm it exudes". *Edge* felt that "when what the first game delivered was such a powerful sense of freshness, more of the same […] inevitably feels like less", and gave it 7/10.

Over on the PC, MMO fans could enjoy the *EVE Online: Red Moon Rising* expansion pack (88% *PC Gamer*) or the latest iteration of the "ugly as mashed offal" *WWII Online: Battleground Europe* (78% *PC Gamer*), but the Egyptian adventure *Ankh* was drawing attention. *PC Gamer* gave it 76%, saying that it was "gleefully self-aware, but also barely conceals its borrowing from the classic LucasArts point-and-clickers", while *games™* felt that it was "one of the best adventures in years" and gave it 8/10.

Join us again next month, when someone might remember to release some games. No promises, though. *



» [PC] *Ankh* drew attention from the press largely because of the involvement of Telltale Games.

CHARTS

FEBRUARY 2006

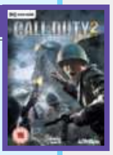
PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Need For Speed: Most Wanted (EA)
2 – Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One (Activision)
3 – Peter Jackson's King Kong (Ubisoft)
4 – FIFA 06 (EA)
5 – True Crime: New York City (Activision)

XBOX

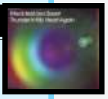
1 – Need For Speed: Most Wanted (EA)
2 – Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One (Activision)
3 – Peter Jackson's King Kong (Ubisoft)
4 – Star Wars Battlefront II (LucasArts)
5 – Gun (Activision)

PC



1 – Call Of Duty 2 (Activision)
2 – Football Manager 2006 (Sega)
3 – Age Of Empires III (Microsoft)
4 – The Sims 2 (EA)
5 – Civilization IV (Take 2)

MUSIC



1 – Thunder In My Heart Again (Meck ft Leo Sayer)
2 – Nasty Girl (Notorious BIG/Diddy/Nelly)
3 – Boys Will Be Boys (Ordinary Boys)
4 – Run It (Chris Brown ft Juelz Santana)
5 – You Spin Me Round (Dead Or Alive)

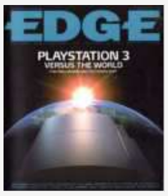
THIS MONTH IN…

360

New Dreamcast shoot-'em-up *Radirgy* is "the perfect excuse to pick up a DC if you haven't already got one", according to *360*. "Sega is revamping a bunch of Dreamcasts and bundling them with the game, such is demand."

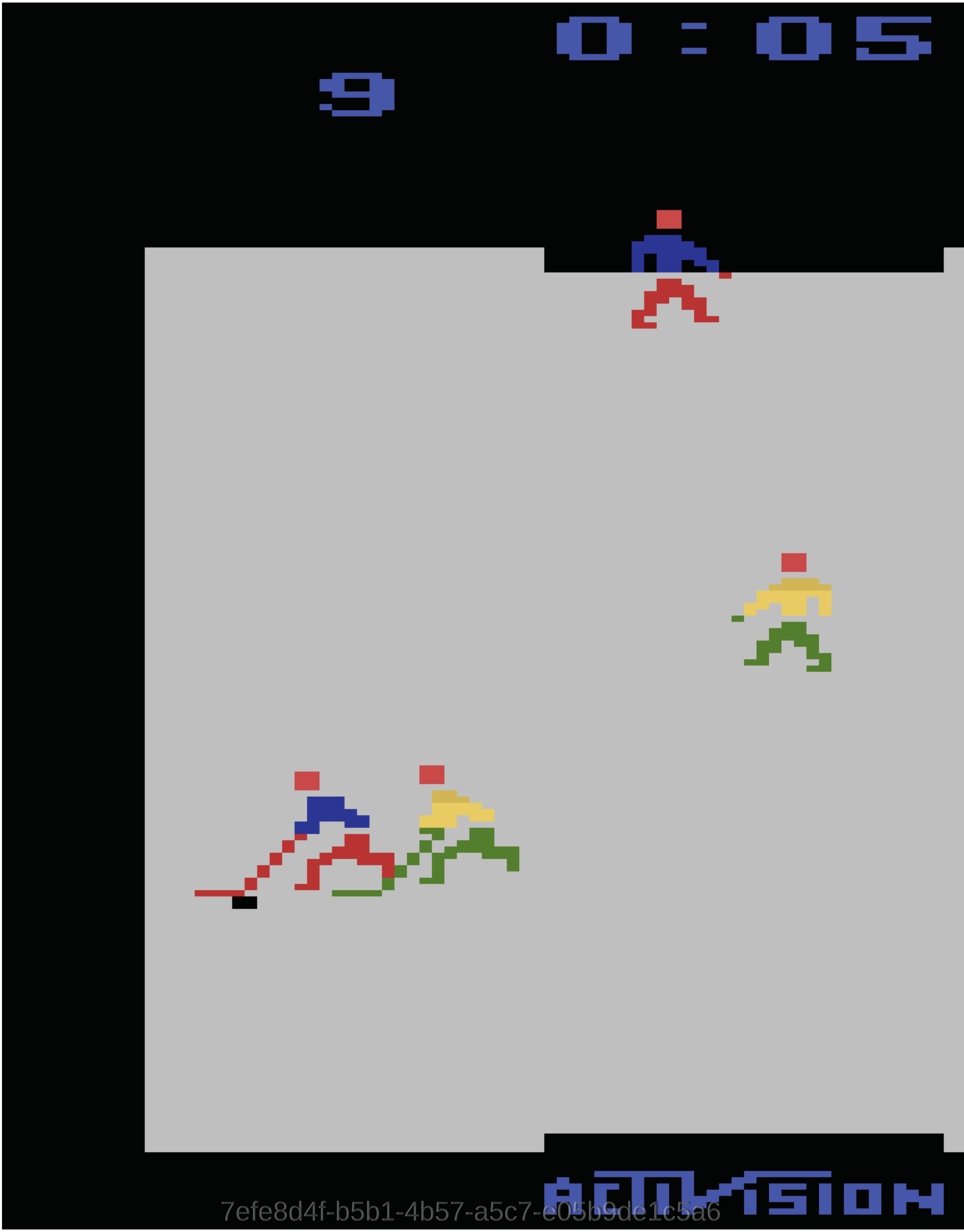
games™

Does some of the stuff here seem unfamiliar? That's because while this version of issue 41 was finished, Highbury's collapse ensured it didn't make it to print. Here's the *Phantasy Star Universe* cover that never was.



Edge

Is the Xbox 360 hardware failure prone? "Enough verified experiences have passed through this office to suggest that the problems are substantial," says *Edge*, but Microsoft insists "there is no systemic design fault".


9
0:05
ACTIVISION

9

Ice Hockey

WHEEL, SNIPE, CELLY, BOYS

» ATARI 2600 » 1981 » ACTIVISION

I've recently been enjoying *Letterkenny,* a sitcom set in a small Canadian town that is full of slightly offbeat and wholly loveable characters. Wayne and his farming buddies Daryl and Squirrely Dan are gifted with an incredible turn of phrase. Stewart and his outcast friends, the skids, enjoy meth almost as much as they enjoy retro games. Then there's Reilly and Jonesy, the ice-hockey players, whose conversations are so densely loaded with slang as to be nearly impenetrable. Although they initially come off as obnoxious stereotypical jocks, their ride or die friendship and well-meaning stupidity make them surprisingly endearing.

The show led me to learn a lot about Canada's hockey leagues, followed by a return to some of my favourite hockey games of the past. Activision's effort was the very first I ever played, and despite the limitation of having just two players per team, it's still a huge amount of fun. The computer opponent is surprisingly intelligent and tough to beat, and although you can't engage in full-blown fights, in the finest hockey tradition you can swing your stick wildly to floor your opponent. The automatic switching that governs which player you control is very effective too, so the experience is largely free of frustration.

Of course, what really stands out is shooting – rather than directing shots with the joystick, it's all about timing. The puck slides left and right along the blade as you dribble, and the angle of your shot depends on where the puck is when you hit the button. It's an excellent way of working around a limited controller, and you'll soon find yourself bouncing passes off the walls and scoring goals from the narrowest of opportunities. It's easy to dismiss old sports games as little more than shelf fillers for completist collectors, but this one is not only an early classic of the genre, but one of the Atari 2600's best games overall. *

EVERCADE EXPANDS

TWO-AND-A-HALF YEARS INTO THE LIFE OF THE EVERCADE, A NEW HANDHELD LOADED WITH CAPCOM GAMES IS SWEEPING AWAY THE DEVICE THAT LAUNCHED THE DEDICATED RETRO PLATFORM. WE SPEAK TO BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT TO FIND OUT THE DECISIONS BEHIND ITS BOLDEST MOVE SO FAR

WORDS BY NICK THORPE AND DARRAN JONES

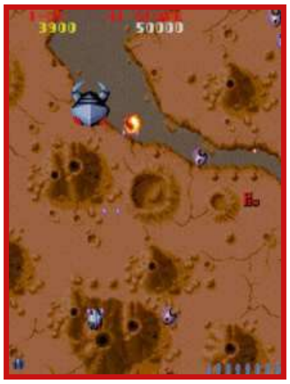
ANDREW BYATT
Managing director,
Blaze Entertainment

You may not know this, but Retro Gamer is *always* watching. Not in a creepy way – we only use our long lenses for bird photography, thank you very much – but we do tend to hang around in Facebook groups and Discord servers, quietly observing the mood of various retro gaming communities. We particularly enjoy watching the Evercade scene, in part because the regular new developments tend to keep discussions fresh, and in part because a dedicated retro-gaming console with its collectable cartridges is still such a unique offering. As the platform's second anniversary was approaching earlier in the year, we saw an interesting split of opinions emerging. Some Evercade fans were beginning to voice the opinion that Blaze Entertainment really needed to sign some big-hitting games in order for the platform to reach that next level of growth. Others were pretty happy with what the platform already had to offer and simply hoped for a refresh of the handheld hardware, a kind of Evercade Pro.

In the end, Blaze came up with something that would theoretically please both camps. The Evercade EXP is intended as the next major step for the platform, a new piece of handheld hardware compatible with all existing Evercade cartridges, and designed to offer an improved user experience. However, the biggest buzz around the handheld concerns its built-in bonus games, which really do threaten to overshadow everything else about the console. Every Evercade EXP will come with 18 Capcom games, including instantly recognisable games like *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*, *Final Fight*, *Commando*, *Strider* and *Mega Man 2*. These are pre-loaded games licensed to the device, with no need for any downloads or activation, nor any way of being deleted. In terms of mainstream appeal, it's easily the biggest acquisition for the Evercade since the *Namco Museum* cartridges that helped to launch the platform in 2020.

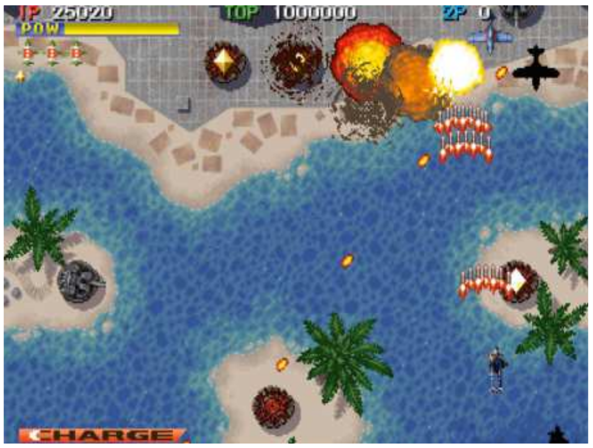
When we visited Blaze Entertainment to see the new system and speak to the team, it was easy to tell how pleased managing director Andrew Byatt was to have Capcom on board. "I think it comes at a good time for us. I think having a company with Capcom's prestige and their history to want to work with us on this project and wanting to be on the device is a big signal." Sean Cleaver, marketing manager at Blaze, agrees. "It gives some credence to us that, you know, after two-and-a-half years of this device and this ecosystem that we've built around it, we've been able to harbour a great reputation of bringing back games that people love, as well as our reputation for bringing more out of the lesser-known in the modern retro development scene. But then getting Capcom, which we've worked on ▶

SEAN CLEAVER
Head of marketing,
Blaze Entertainment

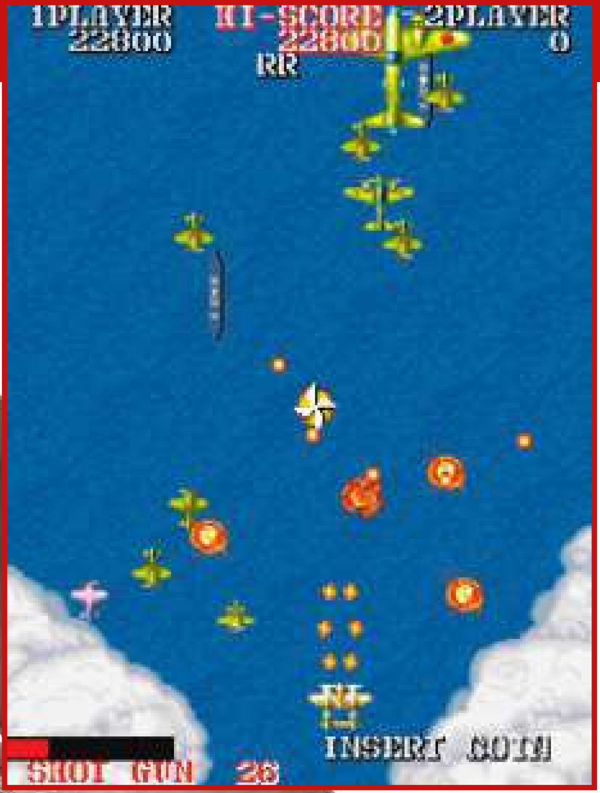


» [Arcade] *Vulgus* isn't exactly a household name, but it does serve to show off the handheld's Tate mode.

START
SELECT
EVERCADE® EXP
INSERT COIN INSERT COIN


1P 25020
POW
TOP 1000000
2P 0
CHARGE

» [Arcade] *1944: The Loop Master* is the only CPS2 game among the arcade games included on the console.


1PLAYER
22800
HI-SCORE
22800
2PLAYER
0
RR
INSERT COIN
SHOT GUN 26

» [Arcade] Passing the Evercade around the house trying to beat *1943* high scores could be lots of fun.

» The shape of the console is still designed to complement the shape of the cartridges.

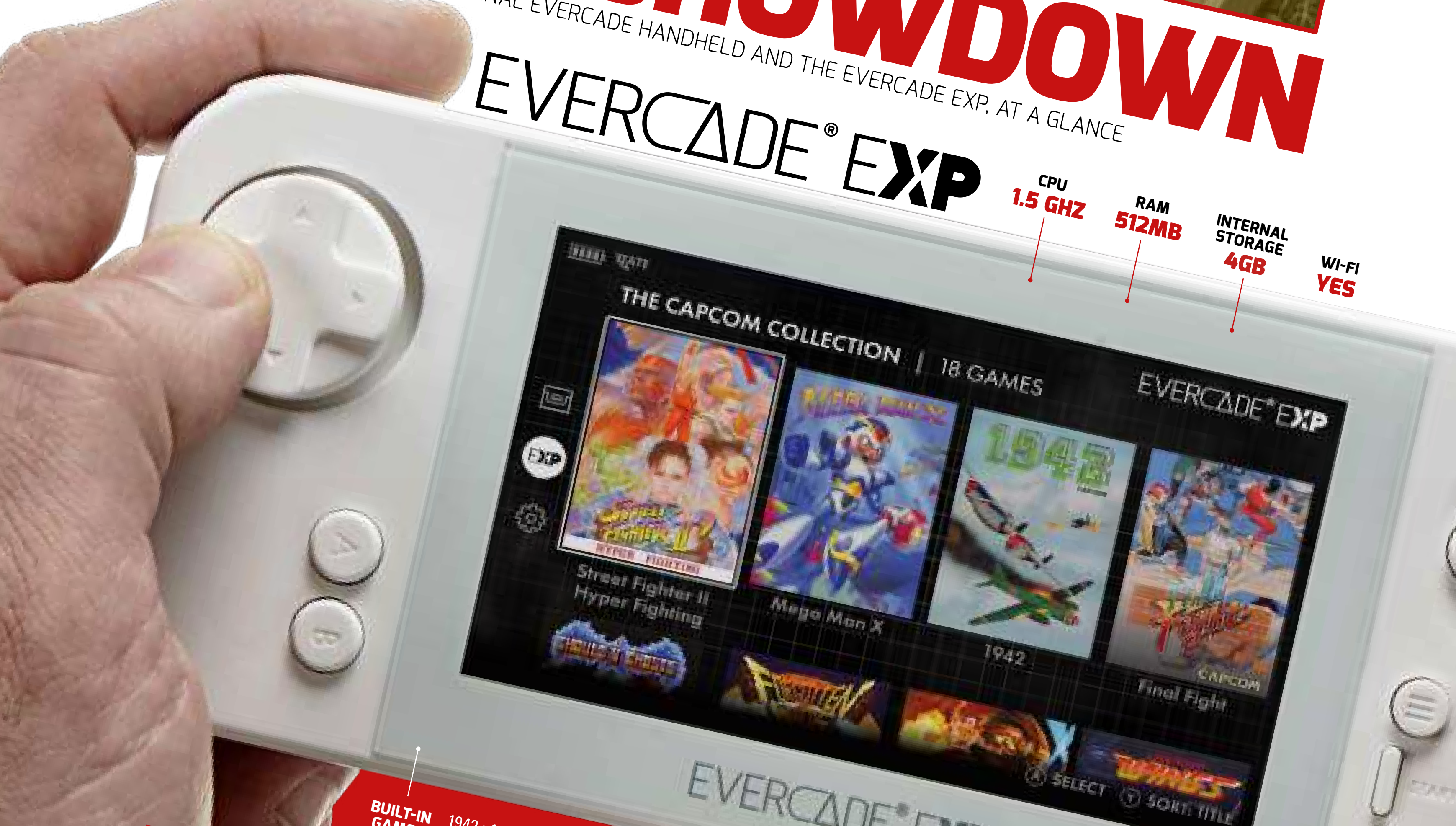
» [Arcade] Games like *Captain Commando* make us hope the plans to link the VS to the EXP come to fruition.

» [Arcade] No joke – when Darran first heard about the Capcom deal, he said, "*Strider* had better be on there."

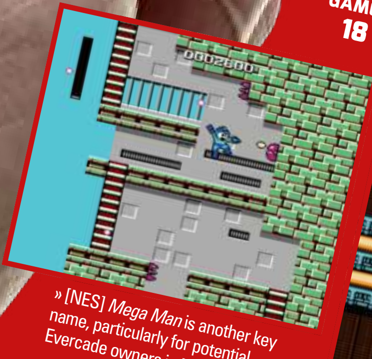
SYSTEM SHOWDOWN

THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ORIGINAL EVERCADE HANDHELD AND THE EVERCADE EXP, AT A GLANCE

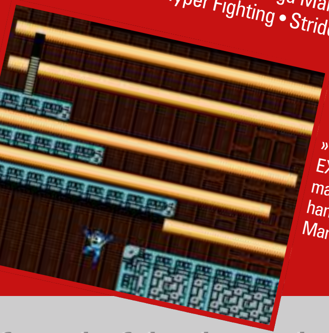
EVERCADE® EXP


THE CAPCOM COLLECTION | 18 GAMES
EVERCADE® EXP
Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting
Mega Man X
1942
Final Fight
SELECT
SORT: TITLE
EVERCADE® EXP

CPU	**1.5 GHZ**
RAM	**512MB**
INTERNAL STORAGE	**4GB**
WI-FI	**YES**
BUILT-IN GAMES	**18** 1942 • 1943 • 1944: The Loop Master • Bionic Commando Breath Of Fire • Captain Commando • Commando • Final Fight Forgotten Worlds • Ghouls 'N Ghosts • Legendary Wings Mega Man • Mega Man 2 • Mega Man X • Mercs Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting • Strider • Vulgus
TV OUTPUT	**720P** (Mini-HDMI output, cable not included)
SCREEN RESOLUTION	**800X480**
TATE MODE	**YES**



» [NES] *Mega Man* is another key name, particularly for potential Evercade owners in North America.



» [NES] The Evercade EXP's save states may come in rather handy during Quick Man's stage.

for the last two years in some way shape or form, and bringing it to the table is very much giving that credence to there being a space for the big publishers – there's a space at that table for all of these people."

In the months preceding the announcement of these games, it was clear that some players were hoping for a publisher acquisition of this level, and the response was largely positive when the reveal finally came. In particular, players who were already sold on the upgraded hardware were pleasantly surprised by the substantial nature of the previously mysterious bonus content. However, a decently sized minority felt that the inclusion of built-in games was a betrayal of the format's key selling point of games on cartridges. "We understand that completely and we will say, as we have done, we are not changing our direction at all. We are a completely physical system, we do physical cartridges, we are not operating any kind of digital storefront, we're not operating any kind of code redemption or anything else," says Sean. "As we've said in other communications, if we could have brought [the Capcom content] any other way, we absolutely would have."

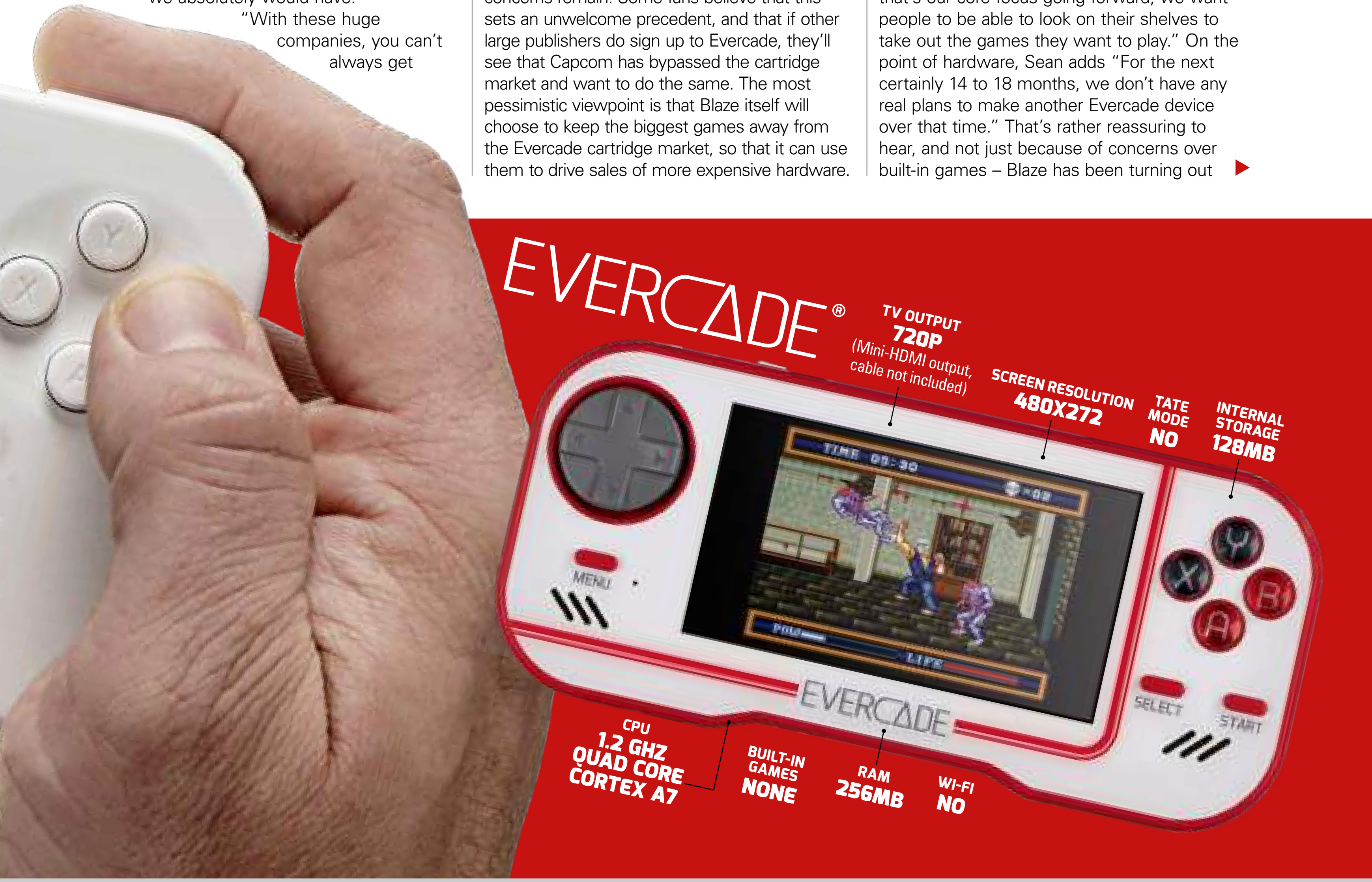
"With these huge companies, you can't always get things exactly how you want them," says Andrew. "I think we fought really hard to try and get this on cartridge and after a couple of years of working on it, we decided that, given what was available, we would go for what we can deliver in this way. There's nothing to say that eventually, as we prove the value of the system and the size of the market, and retro fans get engaged in it, that we won't be able to deliver the cartridges at some point. But right now, that's not possible. So given the choice of not having it or having it, we thought it was the right decision on balance. And as I say, we hopefully will see the benefits of other people jumping on board."

Many Evercade fans see things the same way – the arrival of a developer of Capcom's stature will not only bring new players to the platform, but will potentially convince the likes of SNK, Konami, Sega or Taito to sign up in the future. Still, it's fair to say that some concerns remain. Some fans believe that this sets an unwelcome precedent, and that if other large publishers do sign up to Evercade, they'll see that Capcom has bypassed the cartridge market and want to do the same. The most pessimistic viewpoint is that Blaze itself will choose to keep the biggest games away from the Evercade cartridge market, so that it can use them to drive sales of more expensive hardware.

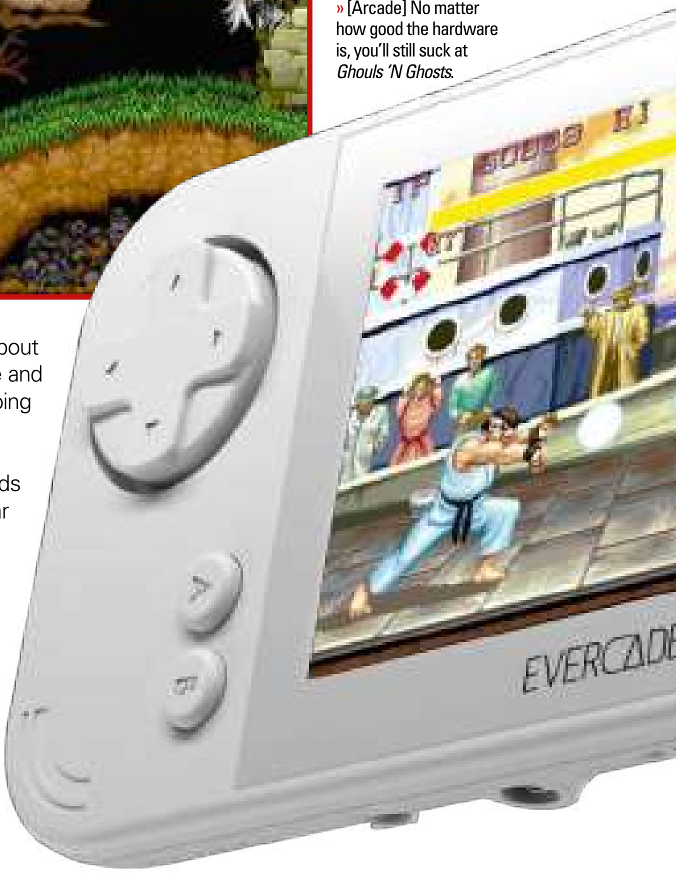
PLAYER 1
970
HIGH SCORE
20000
TIME

» [Arcade] Many players are familiar with *Bionic Commando* from the NES, but the arcade version is used here.

How does the team respond to those concerns? "I think with Evercade, the philosophy behind it is about physical cartridges, and this is a slight detour on the road," says Andrew. "Generally, the direction of travel that we're going in is to build an amazing library of content of games which people can play physically, manuals and boxes, all that kind of stuff. And that's really where our heart lies with this product and this brand. So I think that's our core focus going forward, we want people to be able to look on their shelves to take out the games they want to play." On the point of hardware, Sean adds "For the next certainly 14 to 18 months, we don't have any real plans to make another Evercade device over that time." That's rather reassuring to hear, and not just because of concerns over built-in games – Blaze has been turning out



» [Arcade] No matter how good the hardware is, you'll still suck at *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*.



hardware at a rapid pace, with the Evercade EXP being the platform's third major hardware launch in under three years.

Still, what happens the next time a major publisher does want to work with Blaze, but doesn't want to get involved in the Evercade cartridge ecosystem? "Obviously Evercade is a brand, and we are Blaze Entertainment, we are the company behind it. We now have a good stock in making retro-gaming products, and as our business expands, there might be opportunities for us to do other things in future that aren't specifically Evercade," Sean explains. "For future products and other projects where content might be preloaded, I think it wouldn't be an Evercade product," Andrew adds. "For Evercade, I think next year the focus is going to be on making another 12-plus cartridges, making advancements and new features in the software."

All of this speculation is fascinating, but it threatens to overshadow the Evercade EXP as a piece of hardware, and that would be rather unfair. So, we wondered, what was the thinking behind introducing an upgraded handheld system? "When we released the first handheld and tested this concept of cartridges in today's world, we wanted to create something that was at a value price point that people would be prepared to try and get into. I think the reason this exists is because of all the feedback we've had from the community wanting these advancements," says Andrew. "We started work around a year ago, when the VS was being produced." Sean adds "When we spoke about the road map last year, the VS was in there and the next stage of the handheld was also going to be within the road map."

Taking a first glance at the near-final prototype of the Evercade EXP, what stands out about it is that the device is of a similar size and weight to the original Evercade handheld, but the new LCD screen is greatly improved over the original. "It's gone from 480x272 to 800x480, so it's nearly double the resolution. Obviously, with it being IPS it has much better viewing angles, much sharper clarity of what you're looking at as well," says Sean. "We've actually brought the screen slightly closer to the edge of the unit with a glass bezel as opposed to the plastic front that was on the original handheld. So you get much better access to those angles when you are playing and a bit more protection on that screen." The resolution may sound low, but of course it doesn't need to be high when you're playing retro games, and many games will scale nicely to a vertical resolution of 480 pixels.

» [Arcade] *Final Fight* is maybe better with friends, but Haggar's tough enough to solve his own problems.

The next most obvious change was to the controls, which have had a slight tweak. Two shoulder buttons have been added, bringing the system into line with the Evercade VS controllers, and the Start, Select and Menu buttons have been repositioned so that they're less likely to be hit during gameplay. The feel of the controls was one of the strengths of the original Evercade handheld, and they still feel very good here. However, the biggest new inclusion is the A and B buttons beneath the d-pad, which are intended for use in Tate mode. When this is activated the display and d-pad functions are rotated 90 degrees, allowing for optimal display of vertically oriented games – mostly those on arcade cartridges, such as *Burger Time*. It's a huge improvement over how those games are displayed on the original handheld, as they often looked squashed and indistinct.

Something that is particularly cool about Tate mode is that there's no messing about involved – to switch modes, you just push a button on the bottom of the unit. "We are sensitive, even with these built-in games and devices, about physical – the actual tactile nature of hitting the button and something happening is part of the experience in a way. It means anybody can just press it and play it, and they don't have to worry about

50802 INSERT COIN
KEN
Y
X
B
A
START
SELECT
EXP

» [Arcade] *Legendary Wings* is one of several shoot-'em-ups among the Capcom games on the Evercade EXP.

1UP 10000
HI 50000
2UP 0

FUTURE FUN

WE ALSO GOT TO TRY SOME FORTHCOMING EVERCADE RELEASES – HERE ARE OUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS

■ Whether you're an existing Evercade owner or considering buying an EXP, there are some good-looking carts in the pipeline. *The C64 Collection 1* will be shipping around the time this issue hits the shelves, and kicks off the Evercade's home-computer line. It's a fairly generous package featuring 14 games, including the likes of *Summer Games*, *Winter Games*, *Impossible Mission*, *Stormlord* and *Lee* (the new, copyright-friendly name for *Bruce Lee*). The emulation here feels solid and the games have been chosen to broadly avoid the need for too much keyboard work – the on-screen keyboard is certainly functional, but these never feel particularly elegant. Launching at the same time, *Alwa's Awakening/Cathedral* is a package of two fairly similar modern retro games. *Alwa's Awakening* is a very technically impressive NES game, while *Cathedral* takes inspiration from the NES but is actually the very first game to receive a native port to the Evercade. This cart will be a treat if you're a fan of Metroidvania platformers, but there's nothing here for you if you aren't.

Next on the release schedule are two new arcade carts, both of which have the most to offer to shoot-'em-up fans. *Irem Arcade 1* will be bundled with the Evercade EXP, and this makes sense because although it only has six games, it definitely has some name power. The biggest draw is undoubtedly *R-Type*, the classic shoot-'em-up which is just as tough as ever, but the early Eighties hit *Moon Patrol* will resonate just as much with many players. Genre fanatics will be pleased with the inclusion of cult hits *In The Hunt* and *Battle Chopper*, better known to many as *Mr Heli*, and *Lightning Swords* and *10-Yard Fight* provide some variety. Few names are more legendary among shoot-'em-up aficionados than Toaplan, and *Toaplan Arcade 1* packs five well-known entries in the genre – *Tiger Heli*, *Flying Shark*, *Truxton*, *Zero Wing* and *Alcon* (also known as *Slap Fight*). The remaining games are beat-'em-up *Guardian* and puzzler *Teki Paki*, but for us the single-screen platformer *Snow Bros* is the highlight.

EVERCADE
irem
6

» [Arcade] The critically acclaimed *R-Type* is supported by a number of strong titles in Evercade's *Irem Arcade 1*.

» [PC] *Cathedral* is an interesting release, because it marks the first official Evercade port. Here's hoping many more games follow in the future.

1P
1000
50000
INSERT COIN
KO

» [Arcade] *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* will undoubtedly be a key attraction for new Evercade EXP owners.

1P
ZENNY
31100
7400
31100
VITAL
ITEM

» [Arcade] Even when depicting ugly mutated things in *Forgotten Worlds*, Capcom's artists managed to make beautiful pixel art.

1UP
17200
TOP SCORE
50000
=18

» [Arcade] Games like *Commando* look great on the improved LCD once Tate mode is turned on.

» [Arcade] If you've got time to kill, why not engage in some good old-fashioned mercenary killings in *Mercs*?

▶ negotiating a menu," says Sean. "Much like anything we do with Evercade, we want it to be simple, quick and out of the box. It also means less reliance on anything mechanical doing it, if it was a gyro control for example, that would have put the price up and given another possible thing that might not work in future." Although your right hand covers the mode-switch button during play, we gave it our heavy-handed best and came away satisfied that there's sufficient resistance preventing you from accidentally pressing it.

Other new features aren't quite so obvious, but are particularly welcome and bring the system specs in line with those of the Evercade VS. The inclusion of Wi-Fi is a particularly convenient one as it will allow for easy firmware updates, with Andrew admitting, "We know from the first console that plugging into a PC or a Mac was sometimes hard work." With extra internal storage, this will also allow for Evercade EXP owners to enjoy features like the popular Game Of The Month initiative, in which games from the forthcoming *Indie Heroes 2* cartridge have been made available as time-limited downloads for Evercade VS owners. "We're pretty confident that that will happen next year," Andrew tells us. "The only thing that would prevent that would be not being able to get the content, which shouldn't be too much of a challenge."

USB-C connectivity brings the console in line with other portable devices and will mean faster charging speeds, although it also means the old Evercade to Evercade VS link cable won't work. "We would like to look at a way to combine the VS and the EXP, and I think instead of just making it plug in and work as a controller we'd like to do something a little more advanced and perhaps give you access to those [Capcom] games through the VS," says Andrew, addressing the prospect of a replacement. "It's not confirmed, because it's still kind of a development piece, but that is part of what we'd like to put together in the next year or so for people who buy the EXP and have the VS." That may well go some way to addressing concerns about great multiplayer games like *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* and *Final Fight* being stuck on a single-player device, though it is worth noting that even with the best of intentions from Blaze, it may never come to pass. As Evercade VS owners who still can't play the *Namco Museum* carts will know, licensing is always a tricky issue.

Speaking of the Evercade VS, with that now available as a dedicated home console, we were surprised to see the return of TV output on the EXP. "It's actually still a popular feature on the original system, despite the VS being out there," Sean tells us. "We know that a lot of people still use that TV-out feature for their console – they use it for capture, they use it for their own enjoyment. So it was kind of a no-brainer to put that on there again, especially when you've got great-looking games from Capcom like *Final Fight* and stuff. People do want to see that on a big screen." As with the original, TV output from the EXP is at the typical 720p used by most retro consoles, rather than the 1080p of the VS. "One of the reasons why it's 720 and not 1080 is partially down to battery life," Andrew explains. "It's more demanding, it creates more heat, and ▶

1PLAYER 0
HI-SCORE 20000
2PLAYER 0
1943
THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY
PLEASE INSERT COIN
EVERCADE EXP

TATE TREATS

WHICH GAMES IN THE EVERCADE RANGE BENEFIT FROM THE NEW MODE OF THE EXP?

TECHNOS ARCADE 1

Battle Lane Vol 5
Mania Challenge
Minky Monkey

JALECO ARCADE 1

Cybattler

TOAPLAN ARCADE 1

Alcon
Flying Shark
Tiger Heli
Truxton

DATA EAST ARCADE 1

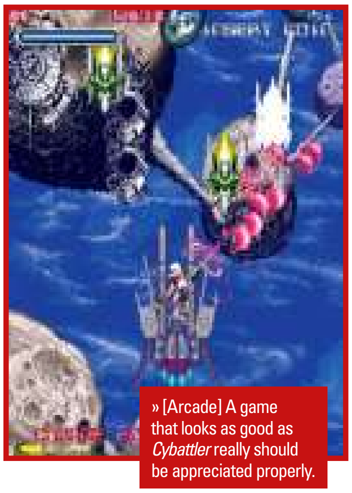
Burger Time
Darwin 4078
Lock 'N' Chase

EVERCADE EXP CAPCOM GAMES

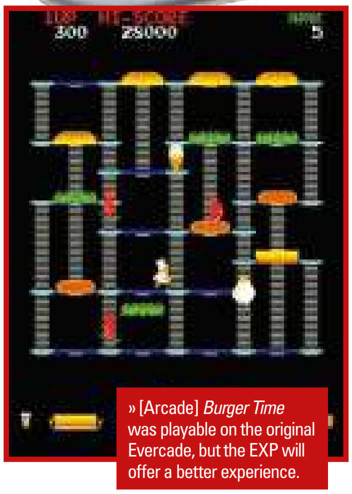
1942
1943
Commando
Legendary Wings
Mercs
Vulgus

ATARI ARCADE 1

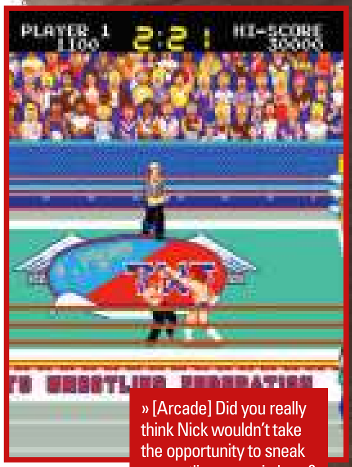
Centipede
Millipede
Super Breakout



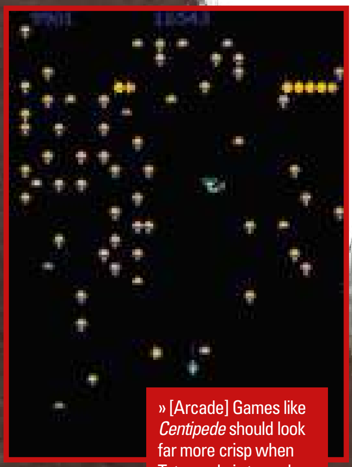
» [Arcade] A game that looks as good as *Cybattler* really should be appreciated properly.



» [Arcade] *Burger Time* was playable on the original Evercade, but the EXP will offer a better experience.



» [Arcade] Did you really think Nick wouldn't take the opportunity to sneak a wrestling game in here?



» [Arcade] Games like *Centipede* should look far more crisp when Tate mode is turned on.

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EVERCADE EVOLUTION
ISSUE 01
IN DEPTH LOOK
ATARI Collection 1
PATCHED & UPDATED
ALSO INSIDE

EVERCADE EVOLUTION
ISSUE 02
THE KING OF CADE
PATCHED & UPDATED
INSIDE

EVERCADE EVOLUTION
ISSUE 03
IT'S COMING HOME
ALSO INSIDE

EVERCADE EVOLUTION
ISSUE 04
ARE TWO BETTER THAN ONE?
ALSO INSIDE

FAN SERVICE

LIAM ISAACS ON THE EVERCADE FAN COMMUNITY

» Liam Isaacs designs *Evercade Evolution* and hopes that Blaze will release a cart featuring Nokia N-Gage games in the future.

■ One thing that has impressed us about the Evercade is the growing fan community that has sprung up since its release. This has been helped by a surprising amount of transparency from Blaze itself, but ultimately because of the passionate gamers who clearly enjoy the console. One such person is Liam Isaacs, who is not only an administrator on Facebook's Evercade Fans Hub, but also designs the Evercade fanzine *Evercade Evolution*. "I saw a few articles online about a new cartridge-based console being developed which had fully licensed game collections and sounded like a retro gamer's dream," he tells us, citing the machine's ease of use as a big appeal over alternatives like a RetroPi setup.

The Evercade Fan Hub has proven to not only be a place where like-minded gamers can find out about upcoming games, but also feel like part of a community. "With the Evercade we're all playing the same games and discovering new games together which creates a passionate community," Liam continues. "It also taps into our nostalgia and our desire to have something physical we can collect."

Simply being part of a community wasn't enough for Liam though and he soon began work on *Evercade Evolution* along with a number of like-minded individuals. Working as a graphic designer has certainly helped with the look of *Evercade Evolution* and it's a long way away from the catalogues he typically works on. "I saw a dedicated Evercade magazine as a great way to combine my hobby and design skills," he happily tells us. "I never imagined it would go from two of us producing a humble PDF which was distributed through a link to my Google Drive to a group of us selling physical magazines around the world on Amazon within a year."

Even though each issue of *Evercade Evolution* can take hundreds of collective hours to produce and the team has never been able to meet physically due to them all working on the project in their spare time, Liam still enjoys the challenge and the fanzine has had plenty of support from Blaze as well. "Blaze have always been brilliant," Liam beams. "After Vaughan [Anscombe] and I produced the first issue, Andrew Byatt got in touch and offered to do an interview for issue two. We've since had Ryan [Dekker], the chief technical officer, do an interview with us on the technical side of things as well." Like many other Evercade fans, Liam is also looking forward to the release of the EXP, but admits to not being too keen on its built-in games and hopes physical carts will remain Blaze's focus going forward. "I think the physical carts are one of the big draws for Evercade fans and is what sets it apart," he says. "I am ecstatic with the Capcom games though, as it shows the big boys are now willing to jump on board with Blaze."

And that news is just the sort of thing that trickles back and excites the Evercade Fans Hub that Liam helps admin. "Our Facebook group is where you can just chat about Evercade and its games with like-minded people," he proudly says. "It's a great community where we barely have anything to do as admins because the members happily chat amongst themselves about the games they are playing, carts they would love to see, upcoming releases and so on. There's always a positive atmosphere, great banter and new members are always welcome. It doesn't matter who you are, as long as you're a fan of the Evercade we're happy to have you."

***Evercade Evolution* is available at the unofficial Evercade resource Evercade.info**

RETRO RUMBLE

HOW DOES THE EVERCADE EXP COMPARE TO THE OTHER RETRO DEVICES OF 2022?

EVERCADE EXP

PRICE £129.99

GAMES 24 (18 BUILT-IN, 6 ON CARTRIDGE)

■ The Evercade offers a good amount of recognisable games, with the likes of *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*, *Final Fight*, *Mega Man II* and *Commando* included, plus *R-Type* and *Moon Patrol* on the *Irem Arcade 1* cart. As well as being the only handheld console here, the big advantage is a range of dozens of multi-game cartridges, priced at £17.99 each.

THE A500 MINI

PRICE £119.99

GAMES 25

■ This tribute to Commodore's Amiga line is slightly cheaper than the Evercade EXP and includes one more game, with titles including *Alien Breed*, *Speedball II*, *Stunt Car Racer* and *Kick Off 2*. The A500 Mini is also officially expandable via a fairly simple USB stick option, which is free but slightly more fiddly than grabbing the Evercade carts.

MEGA DRIVE MINI 2

PRICE £109.99

GAMES 60

■ With games including *Super Street Fighter II*, *Out Run*, *Desert Strike*, *Final Fight CD* and *Sonic CD*, this system is big on value and star power. The drawback is that there's no way to expand that line-up, unlike with the Evercade EXP. Sega has indicated that this is being produced in lower quantities than the original, so it might be hard to get.

Zoġ fears us! He doesn't know that we've lost the Power of the Draġon!

» [SNES] *Breath Of Fire* contrasts with the arcade games, giving players a meaty RPG to dig into.

» [SNES] We like *Mega Man X* the best, mostly because our hero can do wall jumps in it.

generally is more demanding on the device. So it was better to run it a little bit cooler, a little easier on the battery."

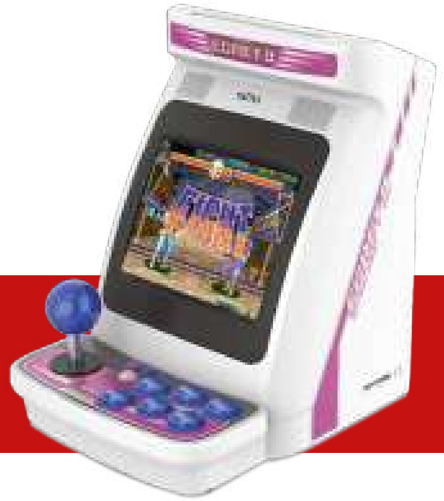
Of course all of the improvements come at a cost, as the Evercade EXP is priced at £129.99 with the *Irem Arcade 1* cartridge bundled in. That may well surprise players who remember the original handheld launching for £59.99 less than three years ago. "One of the reasons that we had stopped the previous handheld is that the cost of manufacturing has made a lot of this stuff go up in price anyway. Even producing the old handheld, we still might have had to put up the price of that again in future. So it made sense to come at it from a new angle with a new device," says Sean. Indeed, the price of the original handheld rose to £79.99 this year, but the new price is still quite a jump. "We knew of a price point that we wanted to hit for this device that made it still affordable for most people," Sean continues. "But also, given that price, we can add quality to it, we can add more premium feels, more premium components inside compared to what we've done previously, and really give a new experience where you get that value."

In fact, where the inclusion of the Capcom games is important to raising public perception of the Evercade, the look of the Evercade EXP is designed to do the same. "We wanted to make the product feel a little bit less toy-like, a little more sophisticated. When you're asking people to put up the hard-earned cash for £129.99, I think they expect these days to have something which is a little bit more sophisticated, which is probably the most appropriate word," Andrew explains. That explains the more muted look, with the red stripes and trim that characterised the original handheld having been discarded. "It has some little nods to the way it was, but that's the main driver here – to make it feel like it's worth that kind of money. Something you could take out in public, and people will say it's a piece of gaming tech as opposed to a toy."

Though the Evercade EXP is easily the biggest news in the platform's scene right now, it isn't the only thing going on. The introduction of *The C64 Collection 1* kicks off a third cartridge line with new numbering, with the blue-branded home-computer range joining the existing home-console and arcade ranges. It's a surprisingly late introduction, given the popularity of home computers in the UK and Europe. "It's a little bit more development intensive – home consoles are the easiest thing to do, arcade is more development intensive and home computers are also very intensive, in terms of mapping and making them run very well," Andrew explains. "And obviously there's disk changes and tapes, which you need to work around and make as smooth as possible because while some people want that exact experience, a lot of people don't." The team is already looking beyond the Commodore 64 to other home-computer platforms, which should mean exciting things to come.

The other exciting thing on the horizon is *Cathedral*, the first game ever to receive a native Evercade port rather than using emulation. "I think it leans into the other sensibility that we've been able to foster, we've advocated bringing those retro experiences from a modern retro perspective, like the *Indie Heroes* line and the *Xeno Crisis*/*Tanglewood* collection," Sean says. The team is clear in its philosophy that native Evercade games should still offer retro aesthetics and mechanics, but beyond that the area of native development is a very new approach that the team is still working out. "I think the benefit of next year will be to get our heads up in this kind of stuff, and hopefully we should see more content like that," says Andrew. Even on this first attempt though, the benefits are clear – *Cathedral* is inspired by NES games but isn't beholden to the limitations of the original platform, allowing it to break the rules when that benefits the gameplay. It also allows the Elden Pixels team to offer modern comforts like proper widescreen support and a more conventional save system instead of save states.

All of this leaves us with the feeling that 2023 will be a pivotal year for the Evercade platform. After our hands-on encounter with the Evercade EXP, it feels like Blaze has once again nailed the hardware aspect of its ambitious plans. As for the software, it feels like the foundations are there, but it will be crucial to build on them with more big-name games and more native ports. Keeping the trust of the existing fans will be important too, and while Blaze has broadly done a good job of that to date, the reaction to the Capcom games shows that it's not necessarily a given. If it can succeed in both of these areas, Blaze has a good shot at substantially growing the Evercade audience, but only time will tell how these things play out. In the meantime, we know one thing for sure – watching the fan reactions isn't going to get dull any time soon. *

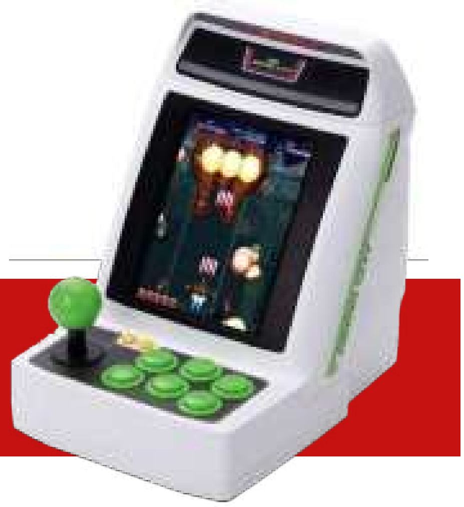


EGRET II MINI

PRICE **€199.99 (ABOUT £175)**

GAMES **40**

■ Taito's mini arcade cabinet clocks in at a hefty price, but includes 40 arcade games such as *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble* and *Elevator Action Returns*, with more available via SD card. It's a standalone unit with a cool rotating screen, but it's definitely not nearly as portable as the Evercade EXP. Just be mindful of potential import charges as well.



ASTRO CITY MINI V

PRICE **¥19,580 (ABOUT £120)**

GAMES **22**

■ If you don't mind braving the import market, this follow-up to Sega's first miniature arcade cabinet offers a shoot-'em-up-heavy list of 22 vertically oriented arcade games, including *Zaxxon*, *Strikers 1945*, *Raiden*, *Batsugun* and *Wrestle War*. Sadly, it does suffer somewhat from input lag. Remember to factor in import shipping and taxes if you do order it.

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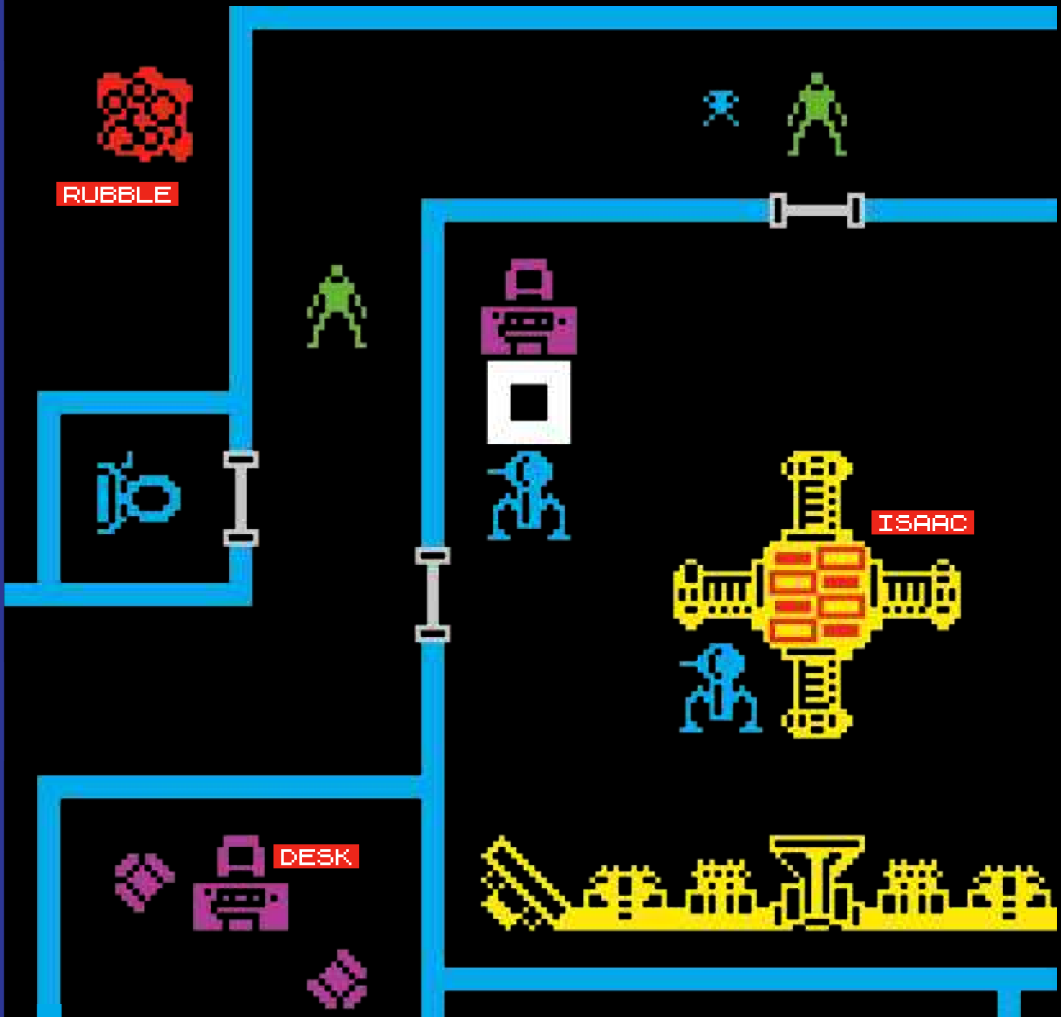
ULTIMATE GUIDE

REBELSTAR

THE SECOND GAME IN THE REBELSTAR SERIES CATAPULTED THE ACTION STRATEGY GENRE INTO THE HOMES OF SPECTRUM OWNERS AND KICK-STARTED THE CAREER OF ITS AUTHOR, JULIAN GOLLOP. SO GET THAT PHOTON RIFLE READY – THE CYBER HORDES AWAIT YOU…

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



REBELSTAR
FIREBIRD

RAIDERS
WIN

While budget games were a massive boon for cash-strapped kids in the Eighties, you never quite knew what you were getting for your £1.99. There were a dozen ramshackle efforts for every little gem, rushed out to earn a quick buck, quantity over quality. Value for money was a huge variable, but for anyone that invested two pounds into *Rebelstar*, there could have been very few worries over whether players were getting their money's worth.

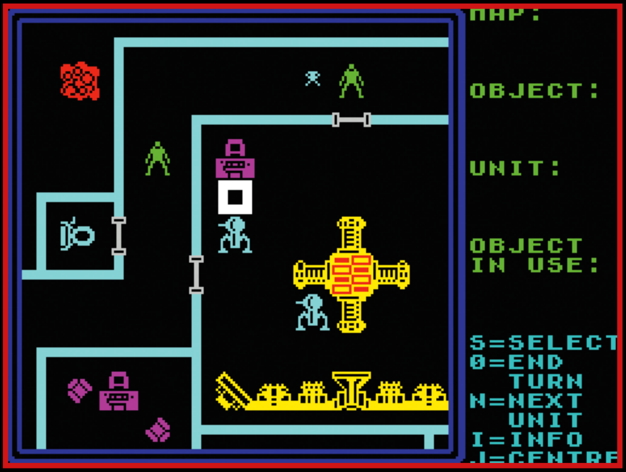
Created by Julian Gollop and released by Firebird Software in the autumn of 1986, *Rebelstar* is a futuristic turn-based strategy game set on the Earth's only natural satellite. The player controls the Raiders, a band of soldiers sent to assault Moonbase Delta and destroy its central computer, named Isaac. In the one-player game, Isaac is guarded by a company of elite droids, varying in strength and agility. After selecting your difficulty setting (which influences the number of droids and your squad), the player's soldiers are dumped onto the moonscape outside the base. Accompanying the humans are tough combat droids, and they use their powerful blast torches to break through the airlocks and into the base.

Once inside, the alerted enemy forces will converge on the intruders. Each Raider comes armed with a weapon and other miscellaneous items, including medi-probes (for healing injured teammates), ammunition packs and light sabres. The entire base and all its defenders are visible to the Raiders, who advance using cover to protect themselves from the droids. The target, Isaac, is in the top middle of the map, but beware: a direct assault is not recommended, given the long corridor that leads to the computer.

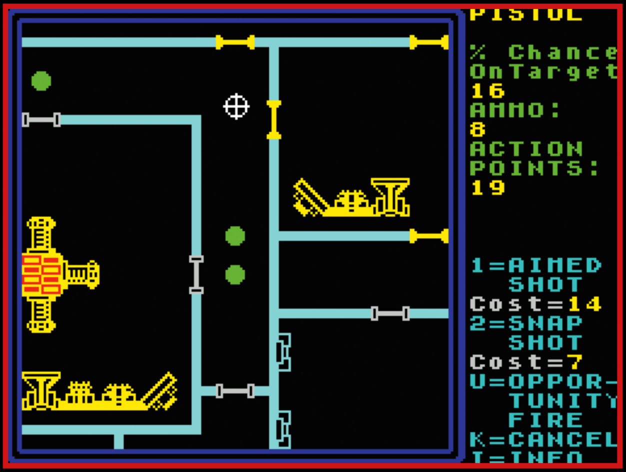
As they have the element of surprise, it's the Raiders' turn first. The player moves the square cursor using the keys QWEADZXC, which form a lopsided square around

▶

> "UNITS FELT ALIVE, WITH THEIR OWN UNIQUE SET OF ATTRIBUTES AND SOME HILARIOUS NAMES"
> **FERNANDO PEREIRA**



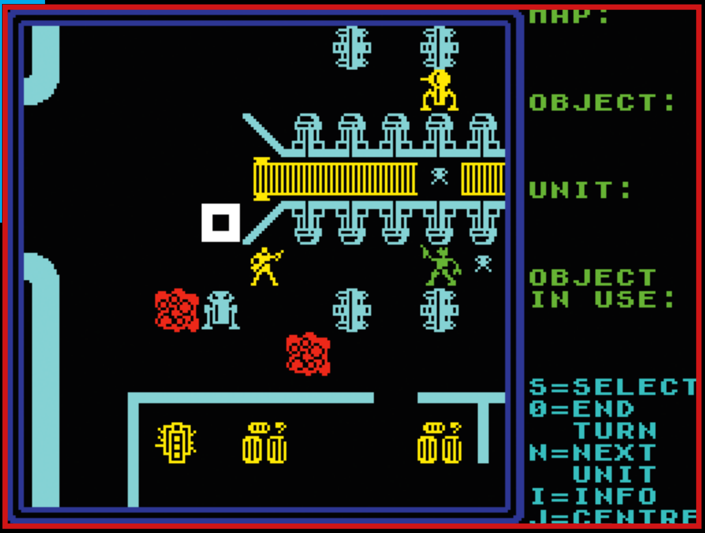
» [ZX Spectrum] *Rebelstar*'s two-player mode pitches humans versus humans and robots.



```
PISTOL
% Chance
OnTarget
16
AMMO:
8
ACTION
POINTS:
19

1=AIMED
  SHOT
Cost=14
2=SNAP
  SHOT
Cost=7
U=OPPOR-
  TUNITY
  FIRE
K=CANCEL
I=INFO
```

» [ZX Spectrum] Entering fire mode changes friends and foes to target circles.



» [ZX Spectrum] Very soon, the detritus of war litters the battlefield.

MASTER THE REBELS

FOLLOW THIS TACTICAL ADVICE TO BECOME A REBELSTAR MASTER

TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE

Knowing and using the correct weapons in *Rebelstar* is critical. Each gun has different allowances for Action Point use, accuracy and ammunition clip. Make sure you balance all these and deploy the host unit according to their weapon's strengths. And don't forget to reload.

THE DEFENCE LASERS

There are three defence lasers situated within the southern half of the Moonbase. Once all three have been destroyed, the defensive shield over the base disappears, and reinforcements drop in. The first will arrive within three turns, with another raider appearing shortly after.

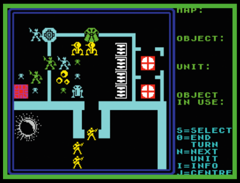
DROID MEND DEFENCE

The droid mend doesn't just repair your droids – it protects them as well. Positioning a combat droid on one of these red and white squares yields a handy 50-point protection bonus. Allied to its impressive armour of 12, this makes the robot almost invulnerable.

I LIKE TO KEEP THIS HANDY… FOR CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

The photon is the most devastating weapon in *Rebelstar*. While its inaccuracy makes it useless at long range, its two-point AP cost for a snapshot ensures it is an invaluable weapon at close quarters. In addition, it has a clip of 18 shots, so you'll get plenty of bang for your buck, too.

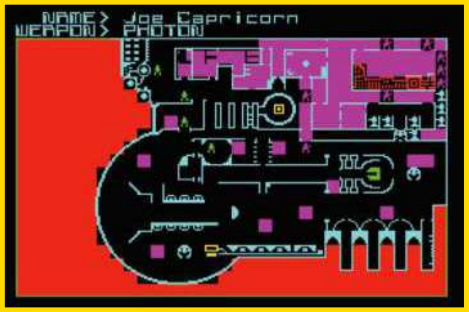
DISTRACT, DESTROY AND TRIUMPH

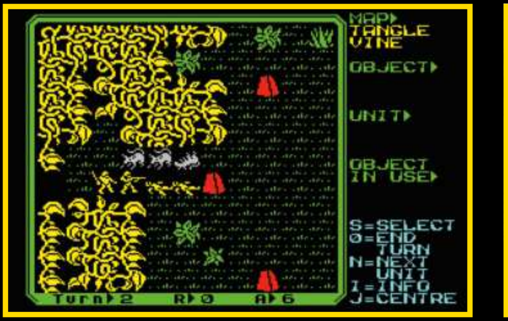


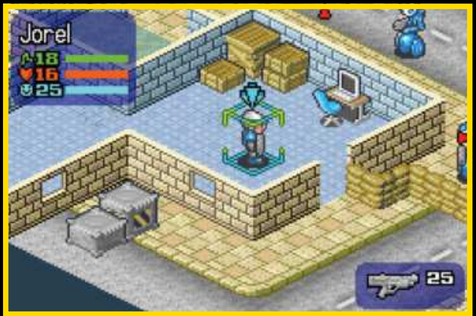
If you don't want to know the winning tactic for *Rebelstar*, stop reading! Use the southeast squad as a distraction by cutting through the airlock and positioning your combat droid just inside the base. The enemy will mass towards it, giving the rest of your forces a free run at Isaac.

A RETURN TO REBELSTAR

FURTHER TALES OF THOSE RAIDING REBELS


NAME> Joe Capricorn
WEAPON> PHOTON


MAP> TANGLE VINE
OBJECT>
UNIT>
OBJECT IN USE>
S=SELECT
0=END TURN
N=NEXT UNIT
I=INFO
J=CENTRE
Turn>2
R>0
A>6


Jorel
18
16
25
25

REBELSTAR RAIDERS

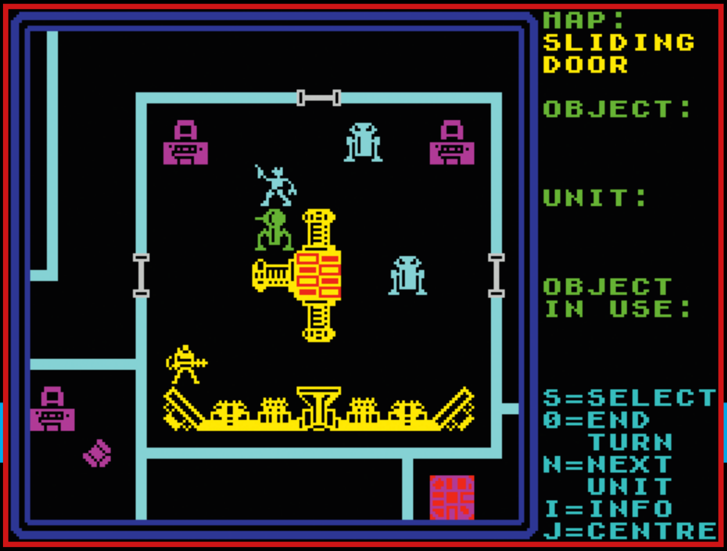
■ The story of the Raiders begins here. Set over three single-screen scenarios, much of the gameplay seen in *Rebelstar* has its genesis in this game. In the first mission, the Raiders attack a Moonbase disguised as a mining installation and include a certain Captain Krenon in their forces. Unlike *Rebelstar*, it's two-player only.

REBELSTAR II

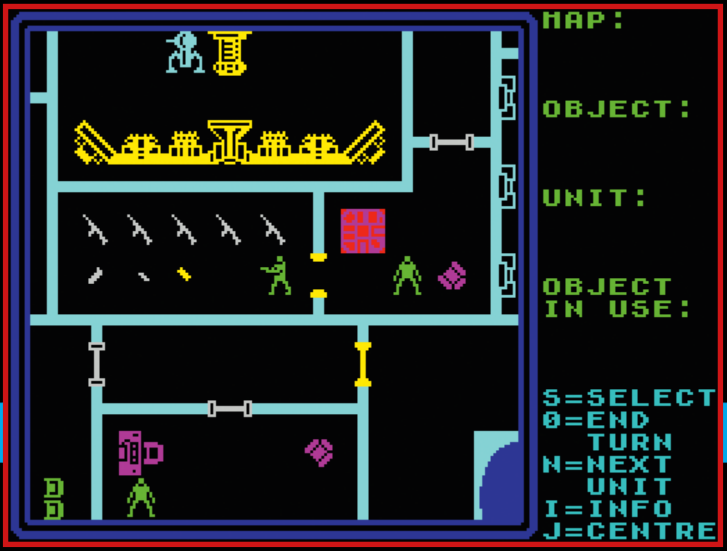
■ Taking note of some of the criticism of *Rebelstar* (most notably its ease), Julian Gollop introduced a strict turn limit in its sequel, inducing a panicky rush across the game's alien landscape. Inspired by the movie *Aliens*, the Raiders must steal alien eggs and board their ship before it takes off and leaves them stranded.

REBELSTAR: TACTICAL COMMAND

■ This Game Boy Advance sequel, released in 2005, merges several of Julian Gollop's previous works into a turn-based adventure for the Nintendo handheld. Featuring a graphical style reminiscent of *UFO: Enemy Unknown* and the refined combat first seen in *Laser Squad*, there's not much here to connect it to the original *Rebelstar* – but it's still a fun experience.


MAP: SLIDING DOOR
OBJECT:
UNIT:
OBJECT IN USE:
S=SELECT
0=END TURN
N=NEXT UNIT
I=INFO
J=CENTRE

» [ZX Spectrum] The battle for the Moonbase is over as Topper Henley destroys Isaac.

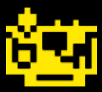

MAP:
OBJECT:
UNIT:
OBJECT IN USE:
S=SELECT
0=END TURN
N=NEXT UNIT
I=INFO
J=CENTRE

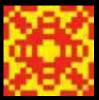
» [ZX Spectrum] The Operatives have two gun caches to loot.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

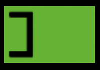
WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU BREAK THROUGH THOSE AIRLOCKS

ANALYSER



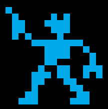


DEFENCE LASER



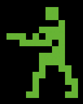
MEDIBED

ANDROID



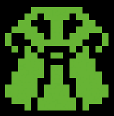
■ The all-rounder of the droid army, the android has an average Constitution score and Action Points, decent weapon skill but no armour. It's armed with a laser pistol.

HUMAN DEFENDER



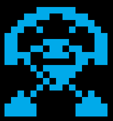
■ While they lack the armour and endurance of their robot pals, the human defenders more than make up for this with cunning and tactical ability.

MASTER DROID



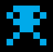
■ The deadliest of the droids, the master droid has a huge hit point tally and decent armour. The trade-off is a low AP count.

MINER DROID



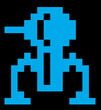
■ This huge and lumbering robot cannot attack enemies but boasts a massive Constitution score making it a valuable blocking unit to protect vulnerable Operatives.

PATROL DROID



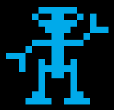
■ Despite their low Constitution score and shot power, don't underestimate the patrol droid. They have a high AP, and their small stature makes them difficult to hit.

SENTRY DROID



■ With medium armour and slightly more AP than the master droid, these robots have the most potent weapon, a laser fitted to their heads.

SERVO DROID

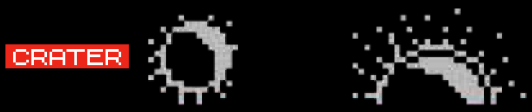


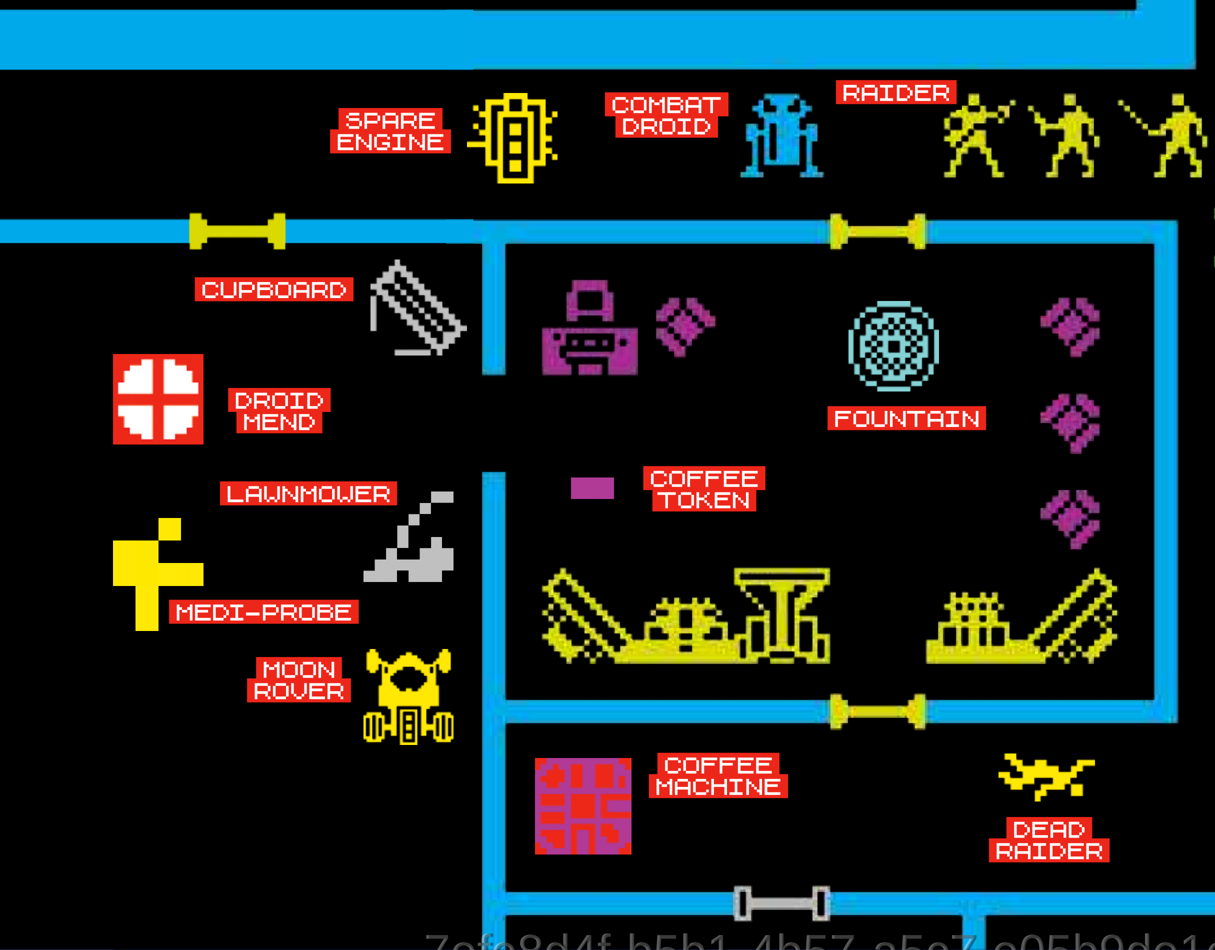
■ These servant droids begin the game unarmed but can be used offensively once the Operatives have opened up their armoury. Not a great soldier, but still useful.

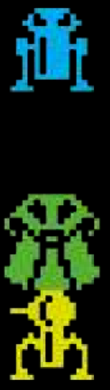
the letter S for select. Highlighting a unit gives you some basic data: map info (if the character is standing in a crater, for example), object info (if they're standing over an object), unit name and object in use. Selecting a character brings up another tranche of information. Morale, Stamina, Action Points and Protection are displayed in the top right of the screen. Characters who witness a colleague's death will see their Morale plummet while constantly traipsing around the Moonbase without taking a breather will ensure their Stamina declines, eventually leading to an Action Point penalty. Protection is an environmental stat gained when a unit is placed on a chair or droid mend – but it is Action Points that the player must observe the closest, the most crucial statistic in the game.

Each unit has an allocation of Action Points (AP), and every action uses a portion of this. Moving horizontally or vertically uses two points, while a diagonal move consumes one or two more. Swapping weapons, picking up items, healing a colleague, mowing the lawn, using a coffee token, whatever you do in *Rebelstar*, there's an AP cost, calculated as a percentage of the unit's overall Action Point tally. Dropping an item, changing items or picking something up costs 10% while reloading a weapon takes 50%. In the heat of battle, with Action Points quickly exhausted, carefully managing each unit's activities is a critical part of the mission.

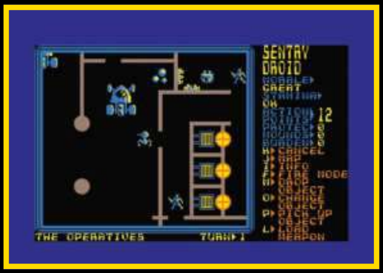
The central use of Action Points is combat. Once armed with a weapon, each unit can fire either an aimed shot or take a snapshot. The former is more accurate but uses extra Action Points, while *Rebelstar*'s engine calculates the percentage chance of hitting a target based on the type of shot, weapon and the unit's weapon skill. After selecting a unit, pressing F (for fire mode) engages the game's alternate engine as all the opponents and your colleagues become coloured circles. The cursor switches to a target, ready to focus on an enemy, and a series of combat-related stats appears: percentage chance of hitting the target, ammo remaining, Action Points remaining, and the cost for an aimed and snapshot. Finally, the player can command a unit







REACTOR
GAS CANISTER



CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW REBELSTAR FARES ON ITS OTHER FORMAT, THE AMSTRAD CPC

■ A year after the release of Spectrum *Rebelstar*, Julian Gollop brought his breakthrough hit to the Amstrad CPC. While much of the original's mechanics are the same, there's enough variety to interest fans. The map is different, encompassing a series of tight corridors and connecting rooms, with the Raiders deployed manually by the player instead of randomly around the base exterior. Combat-wise, laser fire is much deadlier, making opportunity fire and cover even more vital. The Morale and Stamina statistics also have more impact, and while it may be realistic to have panicking units unable to fight, it's a frustrating mechanic that lessens the pure fun of *Rebelstar*. Overall, the Amstrad game is a considerably stiffer challenge, given there are five defence lasers to destroy before you can get reinforcements, plus a turn limit. Yet together with its crunchier sound effects and more weapons, it acts as a decent stepping stone toward Julian Gollop's next big sci-fi opus, *Laser Squad*.

> "REBELSTAR EVOLVED INTO LASER SQUAD, WHICH EVOLVED INTO THE MASTERWORK UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN"
> **FERNANDO PEREIRA**

"I WANT TO BRING REBELSTAR TO THE MODERN TIMES WITH IMPROVED FEATURES WHILE KEEPING ITS RETRO ESSENCE"

FERNANDO PEREIRA

REBELSTAR ARMOURY

YOUR GUIDE TO THE WEAPONS IN REBELSTAR

LASER GUN

■ The stock weapon for the Raiders. Medium damage and accuracy, and holds six shots. But has a high Action Point cost.

LASER PISTOL

■ Smaller and quicker, the laser pistol uses much less AP and holds ten shots in its clip. The downside is accuracy and damage.

PHOTON

■ While less accurate than the laser gun, the photon only uses two AP per shot, making it a devastating weapon at close range.

LIGHT SABRE

■ Once you've run out of ammo, the light sabre is often the only option. It is also helpful for destroying the defence lasers and Isaac.

BLAST TORCH

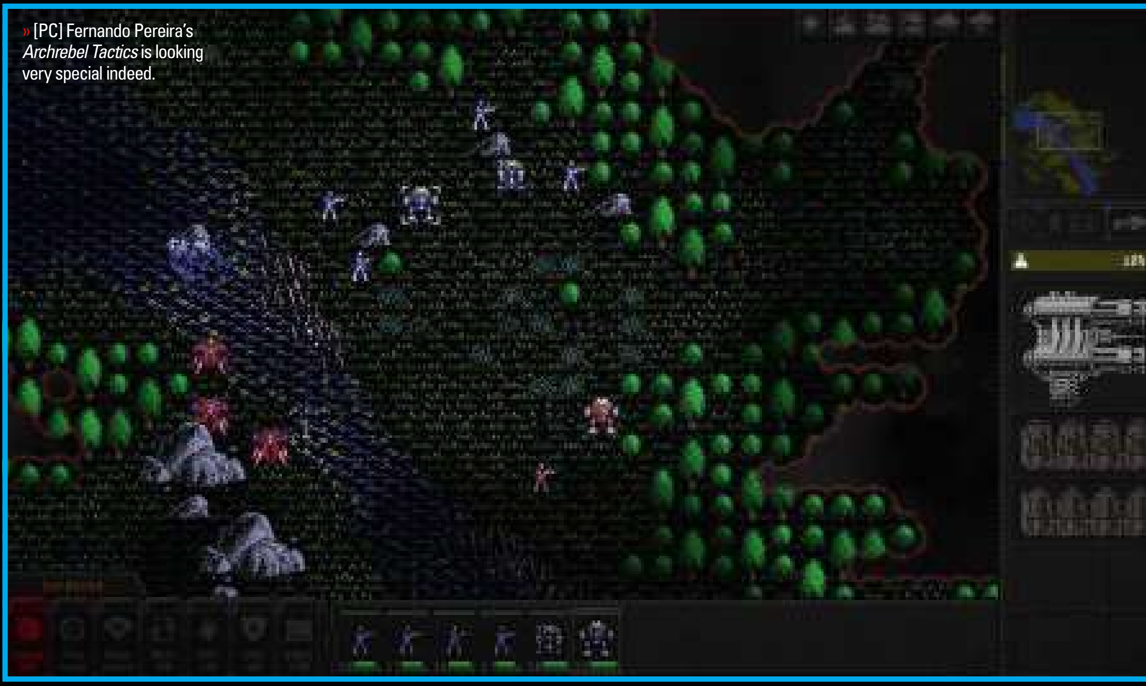
■ Each combat droid holds four blast torch charges. Some are required to enter the base – you can use the remaining with lethal effect on the enemy.

PISTOL

■ The Operatives wield regular pistols, and they aren't much cop. They are slightly higher in AP cost than the laser pistol and are also more inaccurate and useless at range.

AUTO-RIFLE

■ The Operatives have a supply of auto-rifles locked safely away. More accurate than the laser gun, they have a large clip, holding 14 shots.



» [PC] Fernando Pereira's *Archrebel Tactics* is looking very special indeed.

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER EXCHANGES LASER FIRE WITH FERNANDO PEREIRA, THE CODER BUSY CREATING ARCHREBEL TACTICS, A 21ST-CENTURY HOMAGE TO JULIAN GOLLOP'S CLASSIC STRATEGY GAME

Do you remember the time you first played *Rebelstar*?

Absolutely! I was deeply intrigued by the game as I had never seen anything like it. Although I would just watch my cousin play it with his friends, I would constantly ask questions about it.

What do you think makes *Rebelstar* so revered today?

It featured a large scrolling map with many controllable units, vulnerable to a simple but compelling wound and mood system. Units felt alive, with their own unique set of attributes and some hilarious names. Then, you had the turn-based mechanics, shots missing by a few pixels and melee combat when you ran out of ammo. Dead bodies could be looted and caused path obstructions. Imagine all this packed into one game back in the Eighties when platform and shoot-'em-ups were the norm.

Did you play the game against a friend?

My room would fill up with friends to play on the Speccy! Due to *Rebelstar*'s popularity and the long-lasting matches, we would make two-versus-two battles with alternating turns. We worked out there was only one viable tactic – the defending player gathers all their forces inside the computer room. There is little the Raiders can do to overcome this tactic.

Why remake *Rebelstar*?

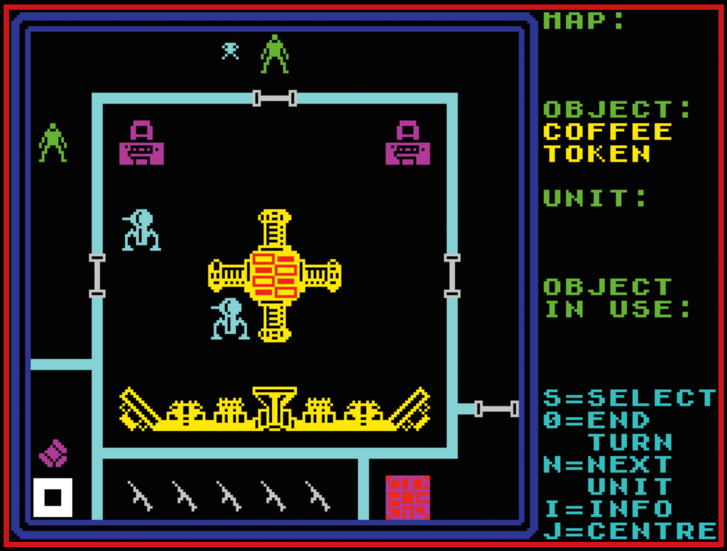
Rebelstar evolved into *Laser Squad*, which evolved into the masterwork *UFO: Enemy Unknown*. Unfortunately, we lost *Rebelstar* as this transpired, and I really miss playing *Rebelstar*. I also want to revive it so a younger generation of people have the opportunity of experiencing it.

What improvements are you making?

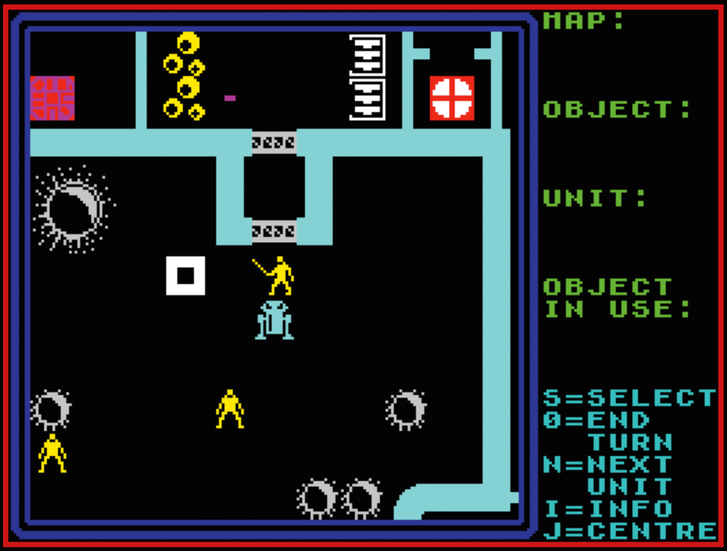
It will feature more sophisticated pathfinding, line of sight, fog of war, a unit levelling-up system, localised body damage, and a hybrid campaign both hand-crafted and procedurally generated. Everything that *Rebelstar* did, *Archrebel Tactics* will do, but better, although some features can be turned off so that nostalgic players can recreate the original experience. I want to bring *Rebelstar* to modern times with improved features while keeping its retro essence, hence keeping the connection to its roots.

You can check out Fernando's progress on *Archrebel Tactics* by visiting archrebel.blogspot.com

Our thanks to Fernando for his time.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Raiders' target, supercomputer Isaac.



» [ZX Spectrum] Persistent Raiders can use the light sabre to open airlocks and locked doors.

▶ to opportunity fire which, when set, fires during their opponent's turn, should an enemy be foolish enough to wander into your field of vision. Back in their turn, once the unit has finished firing, they can move into cover, reload or fire again, Action Points permitting. A successful shot yields a random number of hits on the target, depending on distance, armour and weapon skill.

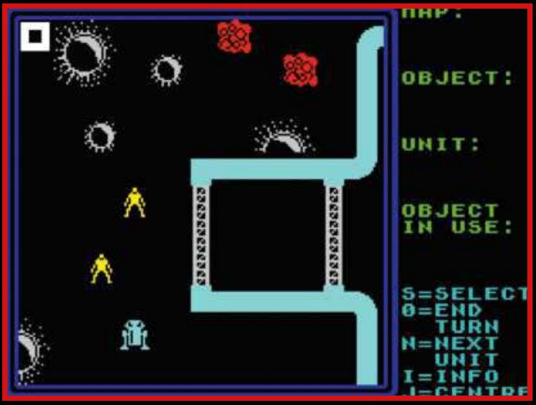
There's no fog of war in *Rebelstar*; its map is fully viewable from the start of the game. Four airlocks, three in the west and one in the southeast allow access, although you'll need the combat droid's blast torch to burn through them (with no ill-effect on the internal atmosphere – perhaps the moon has been terraformed?). The northwest entrance is the closest to the central computer area, leading to a long corridor. Once at the central hub, you'll need those blast torches again to break through the yellow security doors. However, a Raider with sufficiently high weapon skill can (eventually) burn through these and the airlocks with a light sabre. Across the central part of the base is an open garage area complete with moon rovers and spare parts, giving way to the water filtration and garden areas. The southern portion of the map contains droid bays, offices and a work area, while in the northeast, there's the base's reactor and med bay.

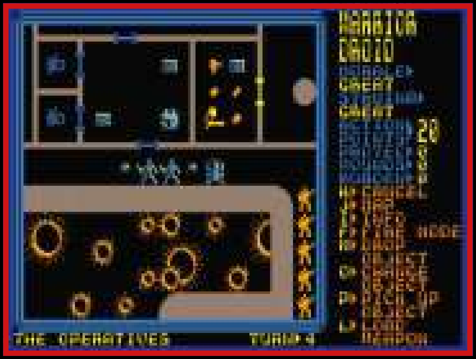
Moving throughout the base uses Action Points, influenced by the underfoot conditions. Piles of rubble litter the northwest part of the map, and once the dead bodies and droid remains start mounding up, these consume extra AP to pass. By the time a game of *Rebelstar* reaches its conclusion, the base's choke points, littered with the carcasses of the vanquished, become almost impassable.

Like its progenitor, *Rebelstar* began life as a two-player game before, at the behest of his publisher, Julian Gollop created a one-player mode. The second player takes on the task of defending the Moonbase as a squad known as the Operatives. A handful of droids from the one-player game remain, although some need to be activated using a droid key. Dotted randomly around the base are the human guardians, armed and able to fire and change weapons, heal each other and move around. The base itself also subtly changes. Some droid bays have been replaced with toilets, while two previously empty rooms now hold a locked arsenal of weapons. In addition to protecting Isaac, pillaging and guarding these armouries are the Operatives' priorities. Fortunately, like the Raiders, the Operatives also receive reinforcements, meaning the former can't linger outside the base for too long.

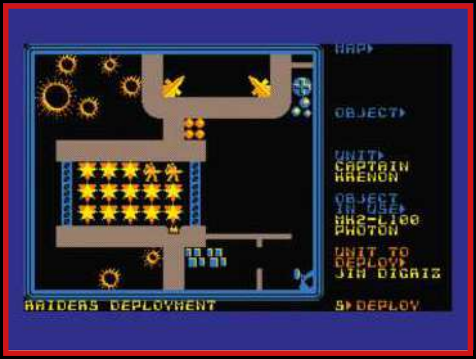
Enthusiasm greeted *Rebelstar* upon release, its pleasing mix of a large map, attractive graphics and fast, accessible strategy gaming appealing to most. "Simple to pick up but deviously devised," noted *Crash*'s Sean Masterson, awarding the game 93% overall and an incredible 95% in value for money. Sales were perky enough for Firebird to commission a sequel, *Rebelstar II*, an *Aliens*-inspired jaunt that introduces a much-needed time limit. Then, Julian Gollop's attention turned to *Laser Squad*, *Lords Of Chaos* and arguably his most popular game of all time, and one that owes a serious debt to *Rebelstar*, *UFO: Enemy Unknown*.

By then, complexity had taken over, an in-depth, world-encompassing mission to save humanity from an alien menace. While only containing one map and a humbler set of rules, back in the Eighties, *Rebelstar* was the 8-bit strategy game that made many afternoons against the computer or a friend disappear. Now that's value for money. ★

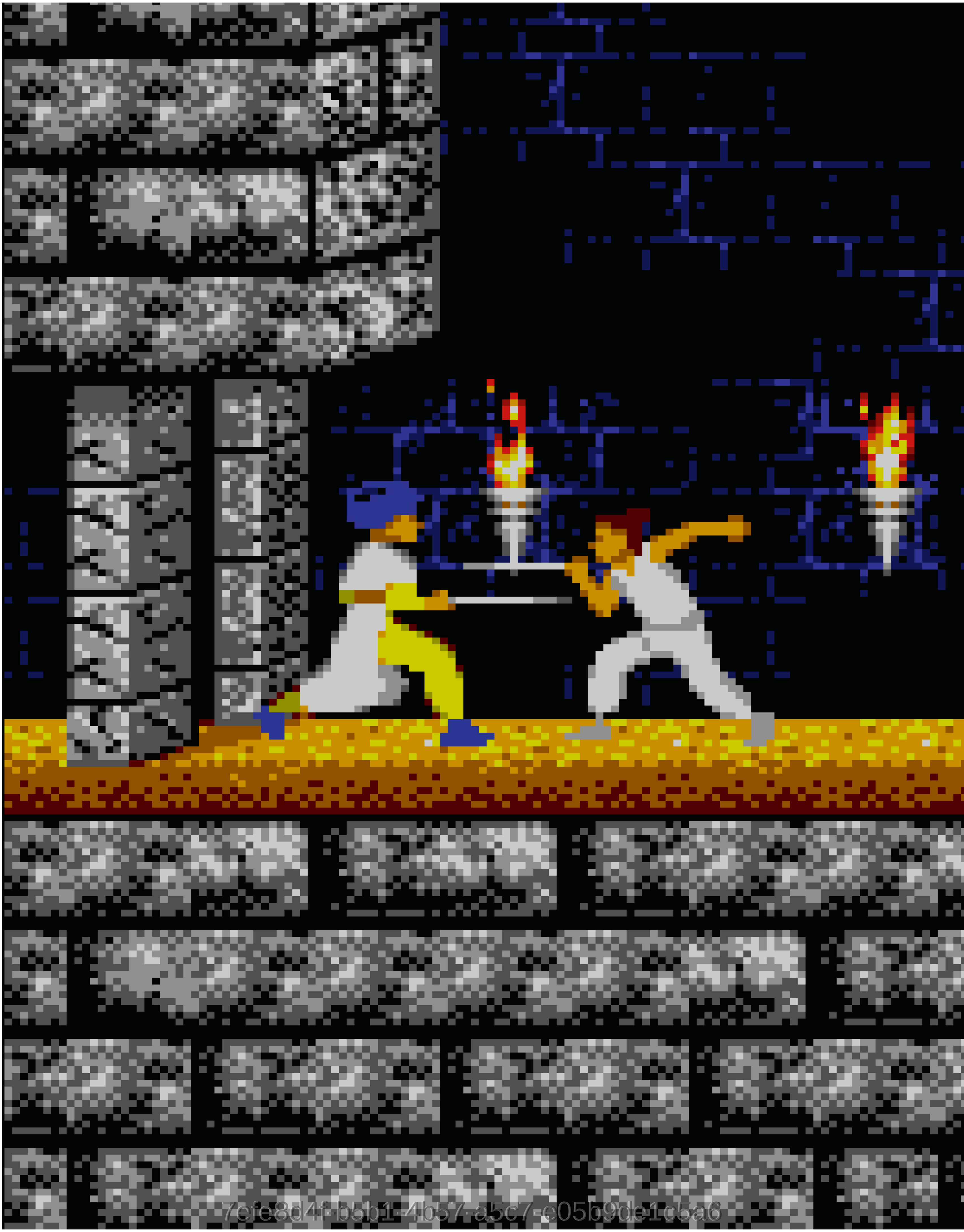




» [Amstrad CPC] *Rebelstar* on the Amstrad is a tighter, more deadly affair.



» [Amstrad CPC] Akin to its direct descendent, *Laser Squad*, the Raiders are deployed manually in the Amstrad version of *Rebelstar*.



Prince Of Persia

FAULTY MEMORIES

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1992 » DOMARK

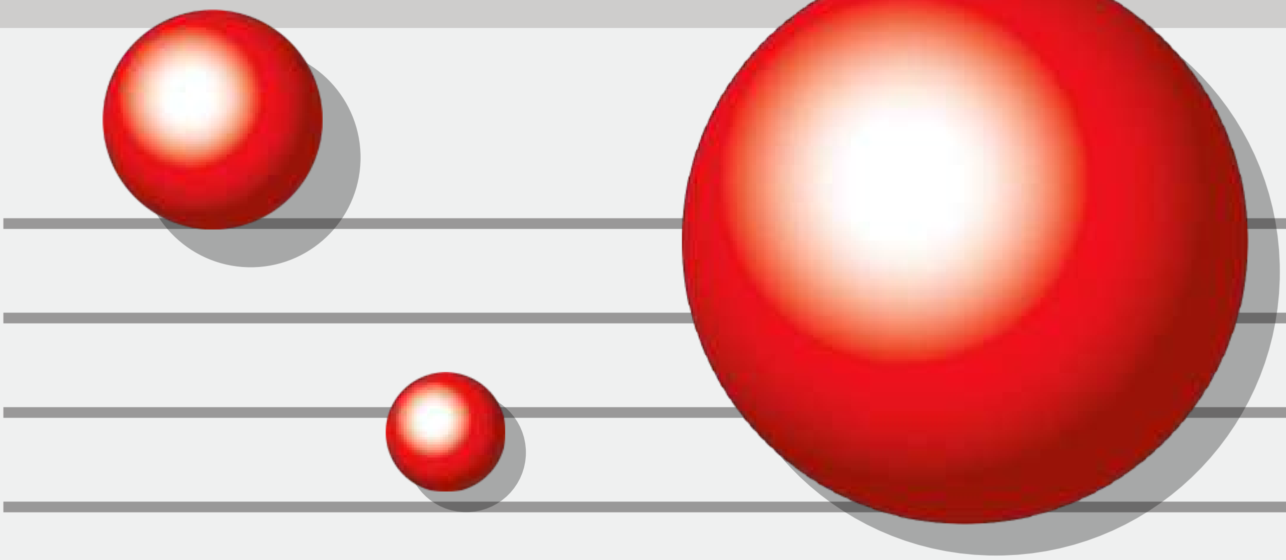
If you regularly watch YouTube you may be aware of a great channel called Retro Core. While it sometimes features hardware reviews, the reason I subscribe to it is because of *Battle Of The Ports*, a brilliant series that effectively puts all the home ports of popular games head-to-head.

Anyway, the most recent video looks at the *Prince Of Persia* games and I was enjoying it greatly until it covered the Master System release. "Sadly, the Master System version is flawed thanks to the jump mechanic," revealed the reviewer. "Rubbish!" I shouted to nobody in the room, "It's a bloody fantastic version and you're mad to think otherwise." Again, there was nobody in the room when I was shouting this at my TV.

Convinced this YouTube personality was wrong, I switched on my Mega Drive (I use a converter) and settled down for a game. And do you know what? He's only bloody right. Whether it's my faulty memory or whether it has always been there, the Master System version of *Prince Of Persia* doesn't quite *feel* right. The animation is lovely of course, and it looks wonderful, but there's a definite lag in the jumps, which can often lead to frustrating deaths.

I've no idea how I missed this back in the day, but I'd imagine I didn't miss it at all and I simply learned to accommodate it as I recall getting pretty far in the Master System game before I eventually upgraded to the Super Famicom version – which as Retro Core correctly states, is one of the best versions of the game that's available.

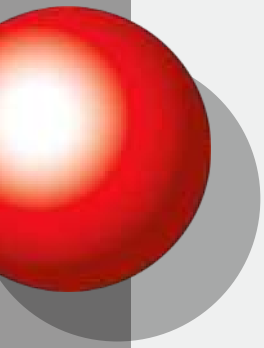
Playing *Prince Of Persia* reminded me that while nostalgia can indeed be a comforting blanket, it can also play tricks on you and even cause you to bellow at a TV screen like an idiot. And let's face it, nobody should be doing that at one o'clock in the morning. *



A·TRIBUTE·TO SYSTEM·3

BUILT ON THE BACK OF AN ASTUTE DISTRIBUTION DEAL WITH ACTIVISION, SYSTEM 3 MADE ITS NAME WITH INTERNATIONAL KARATE AND ITS POPULAR LAST NINJA GAMES. FOUNDER MARK CALE CHATS TO RETRO GAMER ABOUT HIS FIRM'S 40 YEARS IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY

WORDS·BY·RORY·MILNE



Set up by Mark Cale in 1982, System 3's catalogue grew steadily over its first three years, culminating with the space shooter *Death Star Interceptor*, which was awarded a coveted Crash Smash. Encouraged by its success, Mark travelled to the States to try to licence it and his firm's other titles, and while there he licensed several US titles for the European market.

The firm's make or break moment came in the autumn of 1985, when Mark found himself at a trade event without anything to show for his upcoming releases. He gambled that he could generate nationwide publicity for them with a team of karate experts and a troupe of scantily clad dancers, and to his credit this risky move got System 3 a US distribution deal with Activision.

Despite this coup, it was another big American player that published System 3's breakthrough title – *International Karate*, as Activision unwisely passed on distributing the Archer Maclean-coded game in the States. Instead, Epyx snapped up the US rights, and renamed it *World Championship Karate*.

Even greater success came with *The Last Ninja* – a brilliant concept whose promise was realised by coder John Twiddy. This isometric martial-arts adventure was a revelation, and it soon became a must-have title for Commodore 64 gamers.

System 3 maintained this momentum with its next release, the follow-up to *International Karate* – *IK+*. The ingenious twist on the original being the addition of a third fighter. Like *IK+*, System 3's subsequent title – *Last Ninja 2* – expanded and improved on its predecessor, while moving the narrative of the series to modern-day New York, and incorporating puzzles and bosses relating to its contemporary American setting.

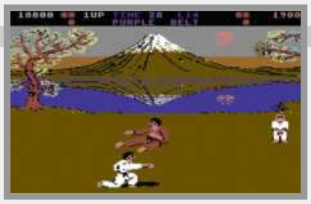
Due to the tremendous popularity of *Last Ninja 2*, the game's combat and arcade adventuring formula was retained for several System 3 projects that came out after it, including *Myth: History In The Making*, *Tusker* and *Vendetta*. In the years that followed, the firm diversified its output, releasing cute platformers *Flimbo's Quest* and *Putty*, and arcade-style racers *Turbo Charge* and *Ferrari Grand Prix Challenge*. The latter being the first of many System 3 Ferrari tie-ins, including 2008's *Ferrari Challenge*, which led to the firm creating the world's first digital car configurator for Ferrari.

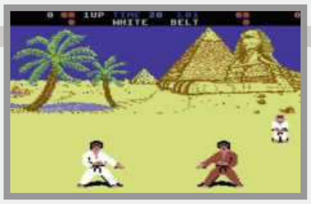
MARK CALE

» After setting up System 3 at the age of 18, Mark Cale built his company into one of Europe's biggest games publishers during the course of the Eighties.

System 3 then saw out the Nineties with the popular PC building simulations *Constructor* and *Mob Rule*, before bringing back the *IK* franchise with *International Karate 2000* and *International Karate Advanced*. In the new decade, the company found success with videogame pinball titles. It also adapted familiar franchises for modern platforms, such as *Impossible Mission*, and *Codename Robocod* via its Play It value label. In the 2010s, it very successfully revisited two of its own creations, with 2017's *Super Putty Squad* and 2019's *Constructor Plus*.

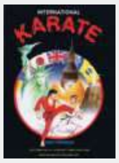
As for System 3's future, the London-based outfit plans to go into its fifth decade in style, with a state-of-the-art reboot of *International Karate* called *IK++*, the ultimate *Constructor* title – *Build A City: Constructor 2025*, an exciting new *James Pond* title – *Robocod 3*, and last but not least – the long-awaited *Last Ninja* sequel.





INTERNATIONAL KARATE

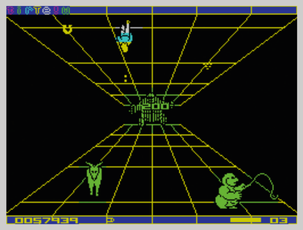
VARIOUS, 1985

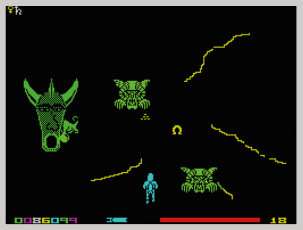


In no small part due to the fast and furious combat at the heart of *International Karate*, the game soon became recognised as one of the best computer beat-'em-ups in a very crowded field. As well as the sheer speed it runs at, *International Karate* boasts intelligent computer opponents. These adapt to your fighting style by learning your go-to moves, and then they block your attempts to use them. Clever stuff!

MARK'S MEMORIES

> We did a deal with Epyx in the US, which renamed *International Karate*, *World Championship Karate* for its market. It was previewed at a CES in 1986, and was the first European videogame to get a CES Showcase award. It also got to number one in the US Billboard charts.





TWISTER: MOTHER OF CHARLOTTE

ZX SPECTRUM, 1986

Inspired by Dave Theurer's Atari classic *Tempest*, *Twister* is an into-the-screen shooter with light platforming, power-ups and a collectible-based progression system. Developed by Jon Hare and Chris Yates shortly before they founded Sensible Software, *Twister*'s strange and sometimes psychedelic stages include opponents that range from hookah-smoking caterpillars to Buddhas with whips to the voluptuous Charlotte of the game's title.

MARK'S MEMORIES

> I'd spent a lot of money on a PCW show, and I had no products – so I put on a show. I went to this agency that had a risqué three-girl dance troupe, and I realised this might be an opportunity. So we renamed our game *Twister: The Mother Of Harlots*. That way it tied into the girls.

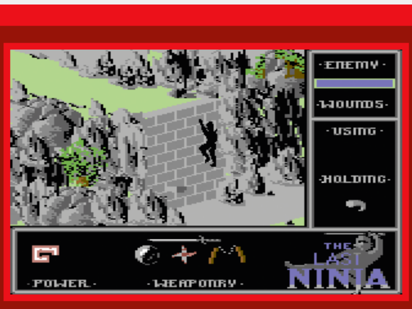
THE LAST NINJA

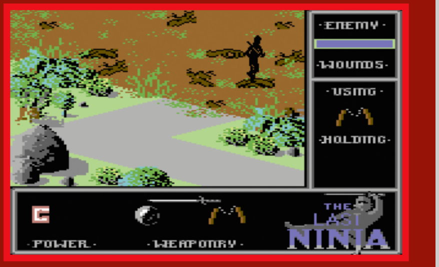
VARIOUS, 1987

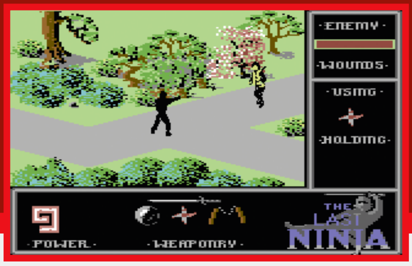
Beyond its beautiful, high-res depiction of a feudal Japan filled with myths and legends, *The Last Ninja* is a textbook exercise in finely honed gameplay. Its well-worked combat gives the game instant appeal, while its lock-and-key puzzles and physical challenges add depth and replay value.

MARK'S MEMORIES

> There was a team working on *The Last Ninja* before John Twiddy took over – we had originally planned to make it in Hungary. But the team there were trying to write it in Forth, and it just didn't work. One thing they did do was come up with the 'Integrator', which drew high-res blocks to build up multiple objects on each screen by re-using the same character set. That was how *Last Ninja* had multiple high-res screens that you didn't need to keep loading in.







PIXEL PERFECT

THE LAST NINJA'S MOST PRECISE CHALLENGES

THE KEY

To get the key you first need a cloth sack. It's hidden at the far-right of the screen to the left of the one with the Buddha.

THE RIVER

The narrower river with stones should be crossed from the left. Jump onto a stone in the middle, and then off onto the bank.

THE SWAMP

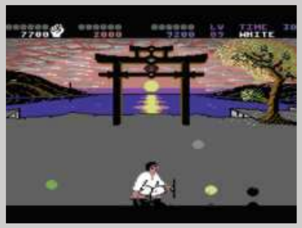
Jump from the front-left of the closest log onto the next, and then jump from the front of each log until you reach the shore.

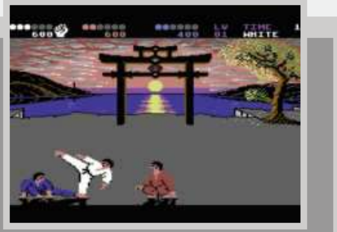
THE DRAGON

To pacify the dragon stand a little to the right of the first rock as you enter the screen, then throw the smoke bomb and hope!

THE SHURIKEN

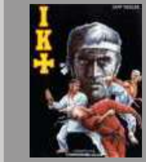
To pick the shuriken up, make sure that your hand touches it. Stand directly in front of opponents when you throw it at them.





IK+

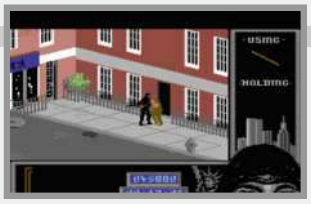
VARIOUS, 1987

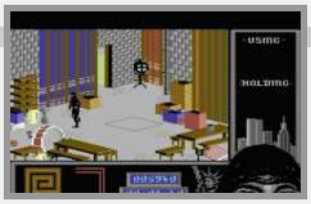


It's amazing how the third fighter in *IK+* differentiates its bouts from those of its predecessor. It does more than simply give you another opponent to take down. It also adds countless permutations to the way battles for points can go, and it eats up what would otherwise be safe space for you to retreat into and decide on your next move. Handily, one of the new moves in *IK+* is a somersault that quickly gets you out of tight spots.

MARK'S MEMORIES

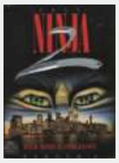
> "The AI was all down to Archer, and the third player was always going to be computer controlled, because otherwise it would have been too slow – especially on the C64. Even now if you play *IK+* it's a bit sluggish compared to *International Karate*. You don't realise how basic games were, but we loved them, because we knew no different!"





LAST NINJA 2

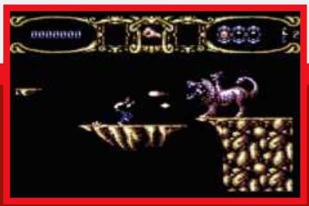
VARIOUS, 1988

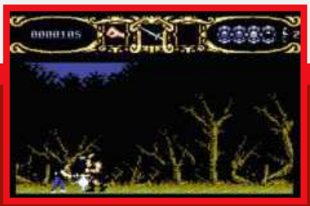


Nothing like *The Last Ninja* was ever produced by System 3's rivals in the years after its release, which made its sequel all the more anticipated. Given that it was bound to be a big success for System 3, it's admirable that so much effort was spent on distinguishing *Last Ninja 2* from the original with a modern-day New York setting. Other innovations include stationary enemies with ranged weapons, such as a clown juggling knives and a foe dropping plant pots from a top-floor apartment. The end result is a fantastic sequel that arguably improves on the original in every possible way.

MARK'S MEMORIES

> "We knew *Last Ninja 2* would be a big seller before we even had one line of code, just because of how big the first one was. We also did a limited edition with a ninja mask in it, and a shuriken! You couldn't get away with that shit today."





MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

VARIOUS, 1989

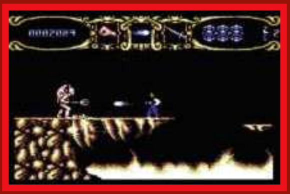
Although it's side-on and scrolls rather than being isometric and flick-screen, *Myth* has clear connections to *The Last Ninja* and other System 3 arcade adventures that came out around the same time. There's a focus on combat, and there are lock-and-key puzzles to solve. These tie into ancient myths relating to the time period you're in, so for example you have to defeat a Greek army in battle to get a reflective shield that kills Medusa.

LEGENDARY LEVELS

THE FABLE-FILLED STAGES OF MYTH

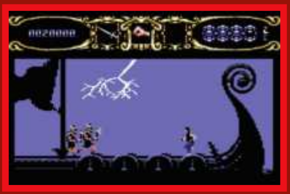
ANCIENT GREECE

After escaping Hades, where you fight harpies and skeletons, you have to overcome a nymph and her army. Medusa is your next opponent, and then finally the deadly hydra.



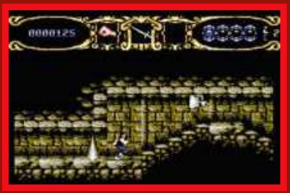
VIKING ERA

Beat the crew of a Viking longship attacking you during a lighting storm, and your reward is to face spirits and dragons. To cap things off, you have to fight Odin.



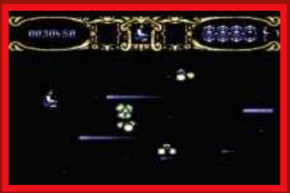
ANCIENT EGYPT

Get past some snakes on your way into the pyramid, and then avoid the protruding spikes, swinging axes and pitfalls in the catacombs that lead you to the dangerous pharaoh.



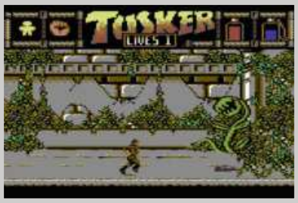
TIME AND SPACE

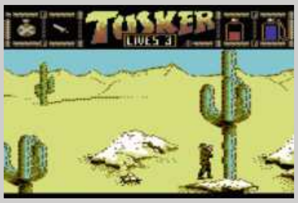
In a change of pace, *Myth* finishes with a scrolling shoot-'em-up. You collect energy balls while you're blasting to earn special weapons for the final boss-fight.



MARK'S MEMORIES

> "We went full-circle after *Tusker*, because with that everyone thought they knew best. At the end of the day, it was about trying to work out what was right or wrong, and that's why when we were working on *Myth* I just wanted to go back to more of a platformer, with timing, and all of the fantasy characters that I wanted. But originally *Myth* was going to be isometric."





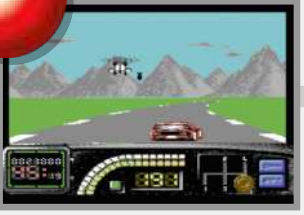
TUSKER

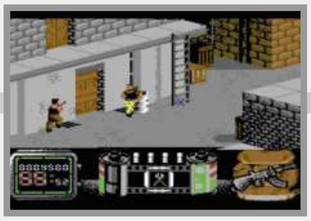
VARIOUS, 1989

■ Thematically influenced by *Indiana Jones* films with gameplay inspired by System 3's *Last Ninja* titles, *Tusker* is side-on with flick-screen levels, but allows a certain amount of movement into and out of the screen. It has some very interesting combat thanks to its eclectic weapons, but its greatest deviation from the *Ninja* games comes from the stiff challenge of its puzzles. More specifically, it can be unclear which objects overcome which obstacles, although this depends on your general knowledge.

MARK'S MEMORIES

> "*Tusker* was a great idea, but it wasn't executed the way I wanted. So for me it wasn't as much of an enjoyable experience as the *Last Ninja* games. It should have been isometric, but the programmers wouldn't follow my vision. The other problem was that they thought the puzzles that had been designed were too obvious, and I was always arguing with them about that. There was a fine balance, though, where if you made something too easy then people would finish the game too quickly, and if it was too hard then players would get too frustrated and walk away."





VENDETTA

VARIOUS, 1990

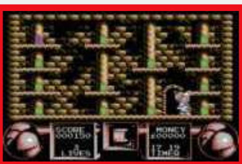
■ *Vendetta* is effectively the computer-game equivalent of a Nineties action movie – albeit without Arnold Schwarzenegger. It has a rescue mission narrative, machine gun-toting thugs and over-the-top street fights. The isometric flick-screen adventure even has a decorated army vet hero who has a lack of respect for authority! It also boasts *Out Run*-type sprite scaling car chases to take you from level to level, and there are collection-based sidequests that you have to complete in order to finish each stage. These are cleverly themed around amassing evidence to help find the kidnap victim at the heart of the storyline, and they help give the game depth.

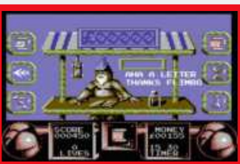
MARK'S MEMORIES

> "With *Vendetta* we wanted to tell a story, and create everything else from that. With the whole secret agent theme, we didn't want players just randomly picking things up, but they were able to find guns, and other bits and pieces. So it was designed to be a game with a lot more going on. We also tried to make it more cinematic. The whole point was to try to be innovative, and see what we could actually do."

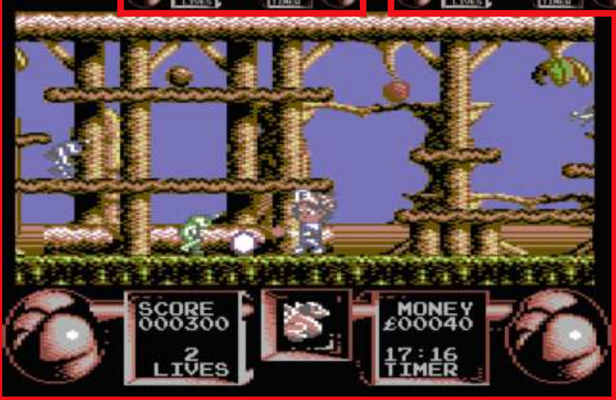
FLIMBO'S QUEST

VARIOUS, 1990





■ It's difficult to define *Flimbo's Quest*, as it dips into several genres. On the face of it, it's a cute and colourful platformer, but one with light trading and enemies you blast with a gun. Unfortunately your weapon is far from effective, with opponents typically requiring multiple shots to take down. But this is well worth it, as they leave behind money, power-ups and scrolls. The latter contain letters of a word, which once completed allows you to move on to the next level. The money can be used in shops to buy power-ups or scrolls, and it can also be found in secret treasure rooms.



MARK'S MEMORIES

> "There were so many games we put out between the three *Last Ninja* titles, and a lot of people actually forget that one of them was *Flimbo's Quest*. That was more of a case of us acting as a publisher than a developer; it wasn't actually a design that I did. Some people had come to us with the idea, and we just went with it, and it was great."

FLIMBO'S FUN FACTS

FIVE THINGS THAT MAKE FLIMBO'S QUEST COOL

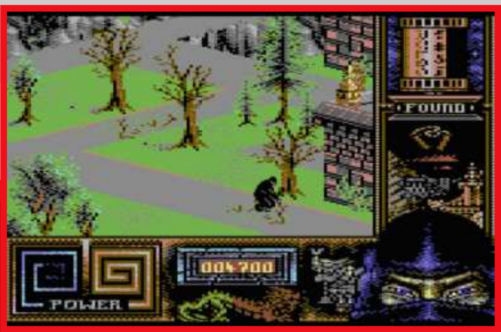
1 The platforming never grows old, thanks to the game's foes, which require a number of shots to take down.

2 *Flimbo's Quest* has rooms full of gold coins. But rather than being stored in a chest, each coin sits on its own platform.

3 If you enjoy sidequests, try getting every coin in each of *Flimbo's* levels in the limited time that you're given.

4 The available power-ups in the game include more powerful ammunition with better range, invulnerability and time extensions.

5 If the enemies you vanquish don't leave behind the object you need then you can just buy it from the in-game shop.



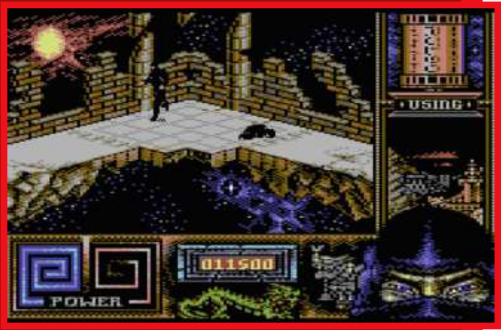
LAST NINJA 3

VARIOUS, 1991

■ In terms of outdoing the previous Ninja games, *Last Ninja 3* succeeds in every area. Instead of one setting, it has five visually distinct locations. As well as lock-and-key puzzles you construct certain items, and your fighting prowess depends on Bushido – a measure of how honourably you act in battles.

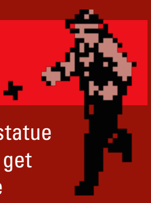
MARK'S MEMORIES

> “*Last Ninja 3* had Bushido – a code that was followed by samurai in feudal Japan, that was just to make the combat a little bit more different. I'm not sure if that was going a little bit too far; maybe we were being too sophisticated. But Steve Jarratt was at *Commodore User*, or one of the magazines, and I think *Last Ninja 3* was the first game to get a 100% review from him. That said, there are things about it I would change with hindsight.”

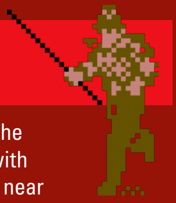


KNOW YOUR ENEMY

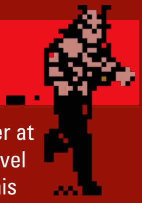
WORTHY FOES FROM THE THIRD NINJA TITLE



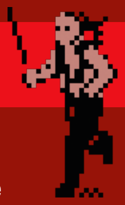
■ Use the statue as cover to get close to the shuriken-throwing soldier at the start of the game, and then attack.



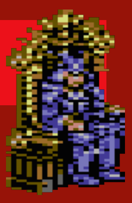
■ Fight the soldier with the staff near the stone samurai in a confined space, or he'll attack from all directions.



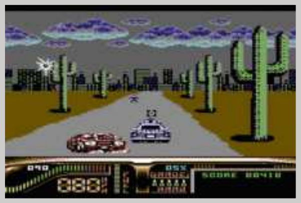
■ The soldier at the end of level one wields his nunchucks mercilessly, so build-up your Bushido before facing him.

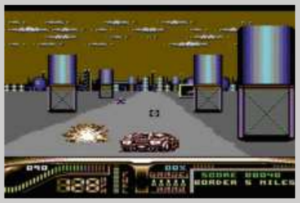


■ Besides a soldier with a sword, the stage two screen with one pine tree has nasty falls – don't fight near them!



■ You beat the evil shogun at the end of the game by deflecting his magic back at him with your sword – or do you?

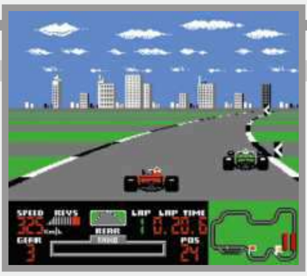


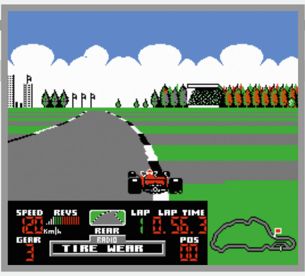


TURBO CHARGE

COMMODORE 64, 1991

■ Before *Turbo Charge*, Commodore 64 combat racing games either prioritised speed over large, well-defined graphics or favoured big, nice-looking visuals over pace. As a result, the C64 versions of coin-ops like *Roadblasters* and *Chase HQ* didn't go down well. *Turbo Charge* may have come out years after those disappointing ports, but it certainly didn't repeat their mistakes. In fact, the *Zzap!64* Sizzler does everything that they didn't quite manage to pull off. The features decorating its roadside scale up to screen height, and they're as high res as the C64 is capable of. Crucially, they also fly past you at a fair lick, more than fast enough to give you that all-important sensation of speed. There are even limited supplies of targeted missiles to complement your unlimited machine-gun ammo. Further thrills are delivered by the game's airborne threats: helicopters and fighter jets, and unlike the C64 *Out Run*, the roads in *Turbo Charge* split, with wrong turns leading to roadblocks.

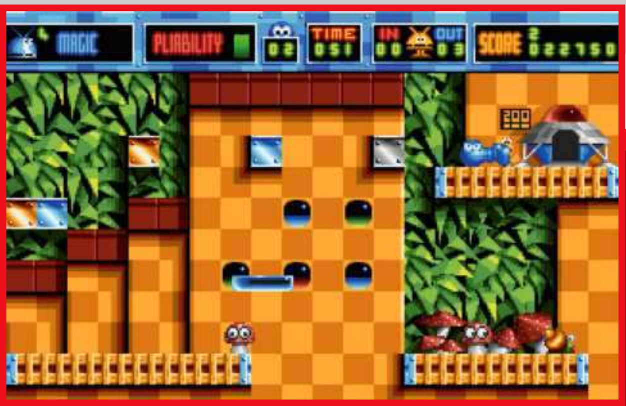




FERRARI GRAND PRIX CHALLENGE

VARIOUS, 1992

■ Given that it appeared on the NES and Game Boy, it's only reasonable that *Ferrari Grand Prix Challenge* is essentially an arcade racer, although it's one that respects the sport it's depicting. So for example, overtaking requires you to cleanly pass a rival. While bumping off them results in both cars spinning out, then your opposite number gets a head start on you. Tyre wear is another area where the game attempts to reflect real-world F1 racing, in so much as a pit stop is required if you come off the track, skid on oil patches and collide with other vehicles too often. Additionally, you get kicked out of the game if you fall down to a certain position, which doesn't happen in F1, but it ratchets up the tension.



PUTTY

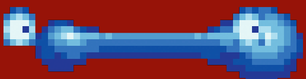
VARIOUS, 1992

Nintendo
PUTTY
SUPER NINTENDO

Of the many great Nineties platformers, *Putty* is one of the most original. Its twist is that its hero is a blob of putty, and this leads to all sorts of possibilities, some more realistic than others. Each of Putty's capabilities is useful, however, and you constantly have to choose between them. Take stretching, for instance, you can use that to reach platforms, but if you can't stretch far enough then you can inflate instead, and float upwards to your destination.

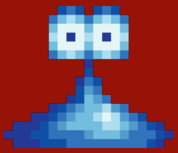
AMAZING ABILITIES

THE PIXELATED PUTTY'S PHENOMENAL POWERS



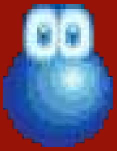
STRETCHING

Putty can stretch up, down, left and right to most platforms within stretching distance, with the exception of those that are reinforced with steel.



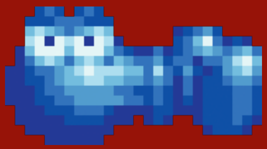
MELTING

While he's melted, enemies can walk over Putty without doing any damage to him. If he melts under collectibles, and then reforms, he can absorb them.



INFLATING

By inflating like a balloon Putty can float upwards to high-up platforms, then if he over-inflates he explodes, taking out most enemies around him.



JABBING

Exploding is an unreliable method of dispatching foes, and it takes time to inflate that much. A faster, more accurate attack is a right or left jab.

MARK'S MEMORIES

The idea was to create a character that could morph into things, and have different capabilities, rather than us making a traditional platform game. Effectively it was very unique. It was an attempt to take the genre further than what had already been done. Otherwise we would have just been competing with the *Marios* of this world, and we weren't going to beat *Mario Bros*. Actually, *Sonic* was smashing Nintendo sales as well. So we needed something different, and we went for a different control system.

LIVES 03
STARS 00
MIA 5
USE
00760

LIVES 03
STARS 02
MIA 5
USE
00020

PUTTY SQUAD

VARIOUS, 1994

PUTTY SQUAD

Like *Putty*, its sequel is a rescue mission, although this time around you're saving putties that have become prisoners of war. The follow-up is more ambitious, with 50 levels to the first game's seven, and there's a different approach to its level design. It's more obvious how to get around the stages in *Putty Squad* than those in *Putty*, which were almost puzzle-like in how you had to work out which power to use in order to get from platform to platform. The cancelled Amiga version Mark mentions was finally released in 2013, largely thanks to the efforts of Phill Boag-Butcher (see **Retro Gamer** 125).

MARK'S MEMORIES

People loved *Putty*, so of course a sequel was planned. But there was a transition in the industry, where people moved from computers to consoles. So although *Putty Squad* for the Amiga was finished, we had to scrap it, and focus on converting it to consoles.

CONSTRUCTOR

VARIOUS, 1997

CONSTRUCTOR

Builders don't have the best reputations, and *Constructor* takes that to hilarious extremes. You have to make profits while putting rivals out of business, and in that respect anything goes. You start small by building cheap houses with low rents, but by keeping the council happy you're allowed to build more expensive homes with higher rents. This doesn't go unnoticed by your opposition, and soon they're sending undesirables to live next to your properties and taking over your houses – of course that means war!

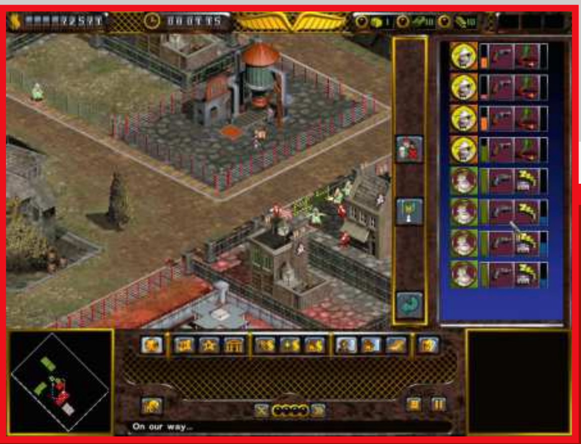
MARK'S MEMORIES

Constructor was created to be about building a city, and having characters who you could interact with. When Maxis was doing *SimCity* we were out there talking with it about how *Constructor* was going to be a variation on its range – it was a different take on *SimCity*. Then EA bought Maxis, and we were dealing with EA. It liked the idea of the characters, but it didn't like the art style, so it passed on it. But the way we sold EA the characters in *Constructor* inspired the creation of *The Sims*.

MOB RULE

VARIOUS, 1999

Mob Rule builds on an interesting aspect of its predecessor *Constructor*, which allows you to hire gangsters to sort out rivals. In the sequel, you actually *play* one of the bad guys, a lowly criminal hoping to rise to the heights of crime boss. Unlike *Constructor*, in *Mob Rule* there are three classes of employees: workers – who construct buildings for you, fixers – who do the maintenance on your properties, and gangsters – who do your dirty work. This includes taking over your opponent's properties while 'taking care' of their workers. *Mob Rule* also encourages you to build immoral business premises, such as brothels and drinking dens.



MARK'S MEMORIES

> A lot of crime syndicates are run through construction companies, so that was a natural fit for a game. *Mob Rule* just worked really well as a concept, and people loved it. They enjoyed sending the boys around to sort out the competition, or sending someone off to bury a body!

LIFE OF CRIME

THE BUILDING SIM'S MOST IMMORAL ACTIVITIES

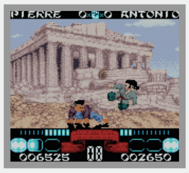
1. Committing crimes in *Mob Rule* attracts the police, but you can bribe them to visit your enemy's illicit businesses instead.
2. Dead bodies don't go unnoticed, so cremate them or get them moved to a rival's property to encourage the building to decay.
3. The ghosts in *Mob Rule* have several uses, like possessing your foe's employees, haunting their houses and raising the dead.
4. Since empty homes fall into disrepair and collapse, whacking rival's tenants is also an attack on your enemy's bank balance.
5. To really upset your opponent, send a psycho to one of their structures – he'll take everyone out and then wreck the place!

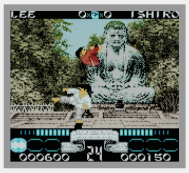
INTERNATIONAL KARATE 2000

GAME BOY COLOR, 2000

INTERNATIONAL KARATE
GAME BOY COLOR

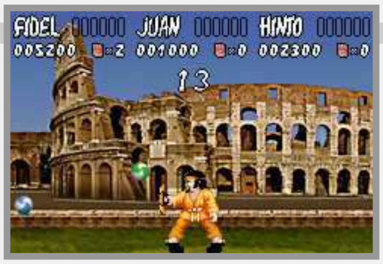
A complete overhaul of the C64 original, *IK 2000* makes use of the GBC's superior hardware to introduce faster combat to the series, plus a choice of 12 playable fighters and picture-postcard backdrops. These scroll a little to each side rather than being static, and there are 14 of them, each located in a different part of the world.





MARK'S MEMORIES

> The simplicity of the fighting in *IK* suited the Game Boy Color. But I never considered putting it on the original Game Boy, because for me it was a difficult machine to get games to work well on, and at that stage we were working on projects for the Atari Lynx.



INTERNATIONAL KARATE ADVANCED

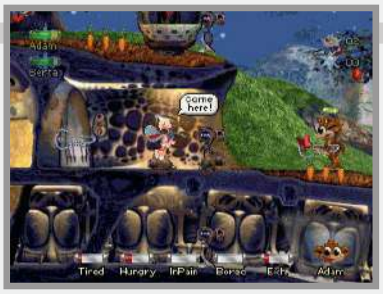
GAME BOY COLOR, 2001

INTERNATIONAL KARATE ADVANCED
GAME BOY ADVANCE

International Karate Advanced is a much improved version of *IK 2000*. Aside from its third combatant, it depicts its fighters in far more detail – in particular their Seventies styling and exaggerated grimaces when they get hit! The developers of *IK 2000* and *IK Advanced*, the Rowlands brothers, later worked on the unreleased coin-op brawler *Bloodlust* for System 3 and Atari.

MARK'S MEMORIES

> What we really wanted was different characters, so every one was a caricature of a fighter in a film. I just loved some of the characters in some of the Bruce Lee films, so we took a lot of inspiration from them. There was also a Chuck Norris tribute character.

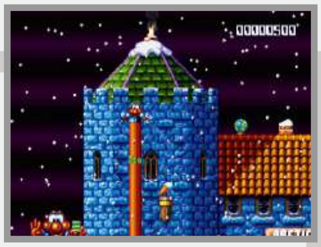


CREATURES: RAISED IN SPACE

VARIOUS, 2004

creatures
PlayStation

Although *Creatures: Raised In Space* is essentially a conversion of the PC title Creatures 3, it was adapted by System 3 to better suit the Sony consoles that it appeared on. The *Creatures* games often get described as pet simulators, and *Raised In Space* certainly has elements of that. Where it builds on that concept is with its puzzles, which are made all the harder by the fact that the player character – a fairy – has to coax the creatures in the game to solve them, rather than being able to do anything directly herself. You also have to keep them safe, and get them to collect stars to generate keys.

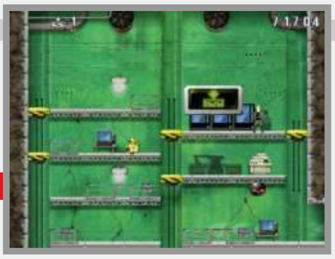


ROBOCOD: JAMES POND II

VARIOUS, 2005

ROBOCOD
JAMES POND II
PlayStation

■ System 3's Nintendo and Sony console versions of *Robocod* are most accurately described as remakes of the Amiga original. As you'd expect, these relatively recent adaptations have nicer visuals than the Amiga game, but there are also some gameplay-related tweaks that have been made to appeal to modern gamers. For example, there are no secret areas hidden in obscure places. Then in terms of level design, the console adaptations depict the same locations as the Amiga title, but with slightly different level layouts. Gone too are the giant Penguin biscuits from the original – and the requirement to save penguins. Instead you have to locate and set free Santa's elves.



IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

VARIOUS, 2007

PlayStation 2
IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

■ The adage that you shouldn't mess with the classics is closely adhered to by System 3's *Impossible Mission* updates. The original's sparse backgrounds have been replaced with something more like a super villain's dimly lit lair. But in terms of gameplay changes, these are limited to colour-coding the robots so you know how they'll attack in advance of approaching them.

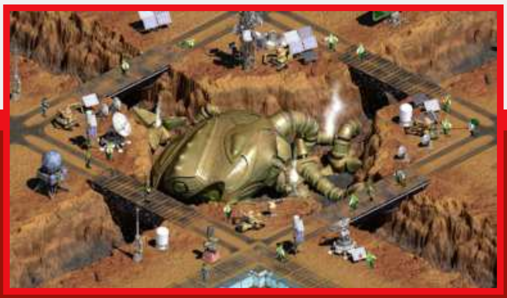
MARK'S MEMORIES

> "We wanted to stick as much as possible to the original game, and the way it was remembered by people, and so we thought reimagining it with new graphics was the best way to do it. That's why there wasn't much creative licence given to vary things from the original blueprint."

IK REBORN!

MARK CALE ON SYSTEM 3'S UPCOMING REBOOT – IK++

"We've been working on *International Karate++* for a long time, and we're now just finalising it – we're looking to put it out as a free-to-play esport. We've game-tested it, and we think the AI is on par with the latest *Street Fighter* title and better than *Mortal Kombat 11*. We didn't want to go for realistic fighting characters; I didn't think that would work, so we went for *Fortnite* characters to try to open the market up. But we also want to put the original game in there, just with the new AI and speed, and see how that works. I appreciate that to some people that it won't be *IK+*, and it's not. Because they're thinking 8 and 16-bit graphics, where as *IK++* uses the latest tech – it's 120 frames per second. And unlike *IK+*, where you just had 16 moves, with *IK++* there are 120. So it's quite impressive."

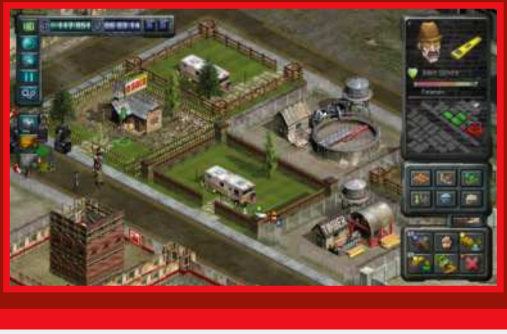


CONSTRUCTOR PLUS

VARIOUS, 2019

CONSTRUCTOR
PLUS

■ Given that *Constructor Plus* came out 22 years after the original game, it's unsurprising that its high-res visuals look so much better than those of the title that it's based on. It improves on its predecessor in other ways too, starting with an in-depth tutorial mode, narrated by the late actor John Challis – best known for playing Boycie in *Only Fools And Horses*. Beyond these aesthetic enhancements, *Constructor Plus* outdoes the gameplay of its DOS-era inspiration by incorporating 47 missions and 140 building types, which is impressive considering the limited number of each in the original. You also get to build on three alien planets.



UNDER CONSTRUCTION

MARK CALE ON SYSTEM 3'S INCOMING SIMULATOR – BUILD A CITY: CONSTRUCTOR 2025

Mark is excited about the next game in the *Constructor* series. "You build lots of different cities. One might be industrial, and another might be an entertainment centre with casinos," he tells us. "You can connect the roads between them, and your cities' characters can then interact. You can also build airports and docks, so you can export things. But that can create a pandemic, so then you've got to put cities on lockdown. It will be the ultimate iteration of *Constructor*. After that I think we're done with it!"

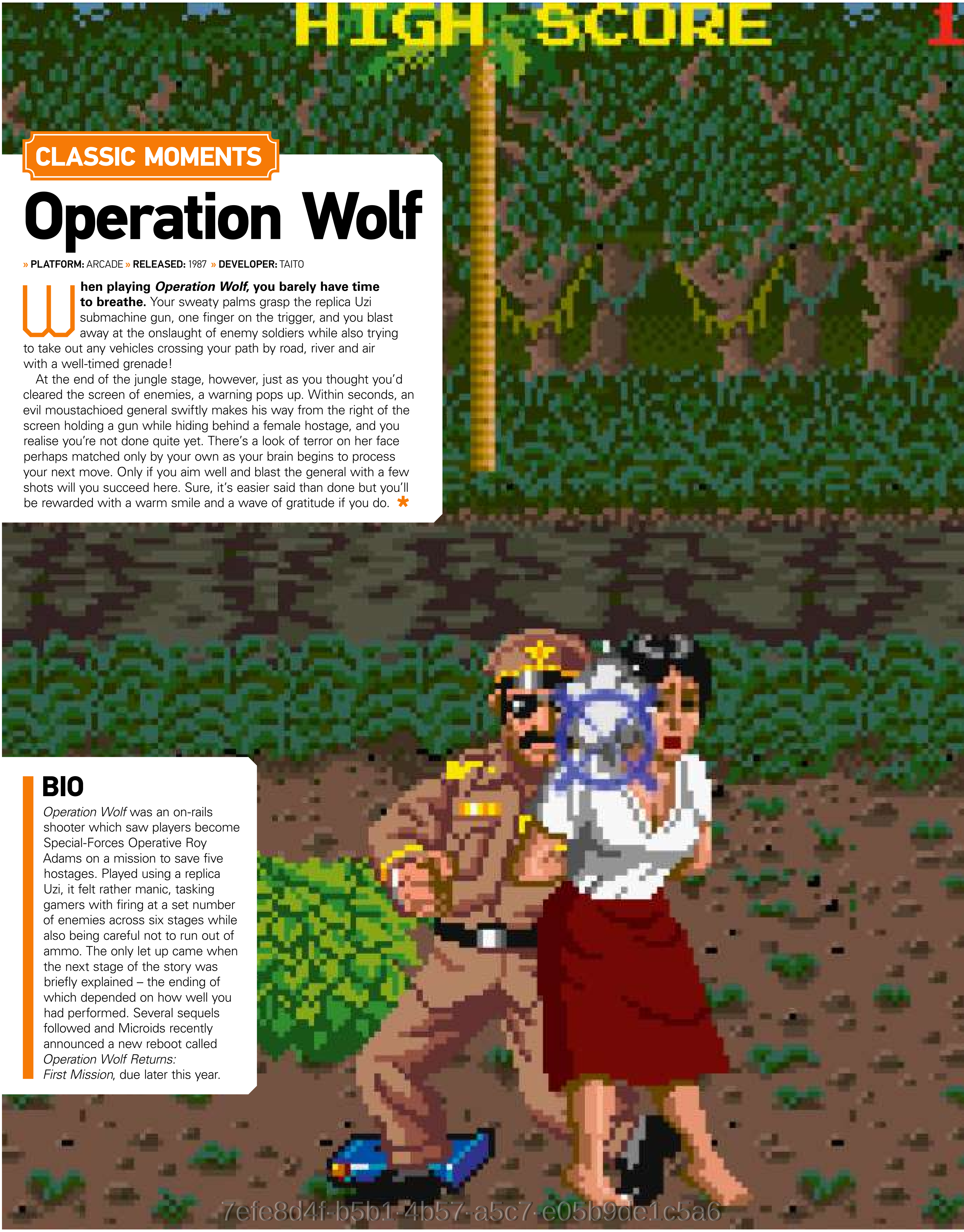
CLASSIC MOMENTS

Operation Wolf

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1987 » **DEVELOPER:** TAITO

When playing *Operation Wolf*, you barely have time to breathe. Your sweaty palms grasp the replica Uzi submachine gun, one finger on the trigger, and you blast away at the onslaught of enemy soldiers while also trying to take out any vehicles crossing your path by road, river and air with a well-timed grenade!

At the end of the jungle stage, however, just as you thought you'd cleared the screen of enemies, a warning pops up. Within seconds, an evil moustachioed general swiftly makes his way from the right of the screen holding a gun while hiding behind a female hostage, and you realise you're not done quite yet. There's a look of terror on her face perhaps matched only by your own as your brain begins to process your next move. Only if you aim well and blast the general with a few shots will you succeed here. Sure, it's easier said than done but you'll be rewarded with a warm smile and a wave of gratitude if you do. *



BIO

Operation Wolf was an on-rails shooter which saw players become Special-Forces Operative Roy Adams on a mission to save five hostages. Played using a replica Uzi, it felt rather manic, tasking gamers with firing at a set number of enemies across six stages while also being careful not to run out of ammo. The only let up came when the next stage of the story was briefly explained – the ending of which depended on how well you had performed. Several sequels followed and Microids recently announced a new reboot called *Operation Wolf Returns: First Mission*, due later this year.

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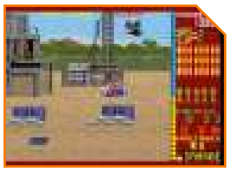
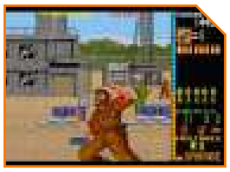
MORE CLASSIC OPERATION WOLF MOMENTS

Civilian Care



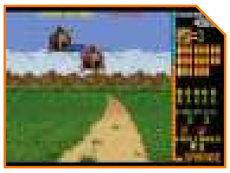
Avoiding the shooting of civilians is a staple part of many first-person shooters today. But you'll savour the first time you blast a civvy in *Operation Wolf* (yes, even the nurses holding a stretcher) – until you realise it zaps you of precious energy.

An Enemy Looms Large



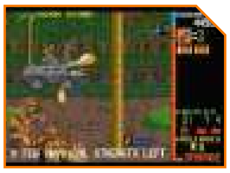
Most of the enemies are in the background but seeing an enemy so close to the screen gives a greater sense of immediate danger. That said, their large bodies means it's also a tad easier to blast them into oblivion.

Attack Of The Choppers

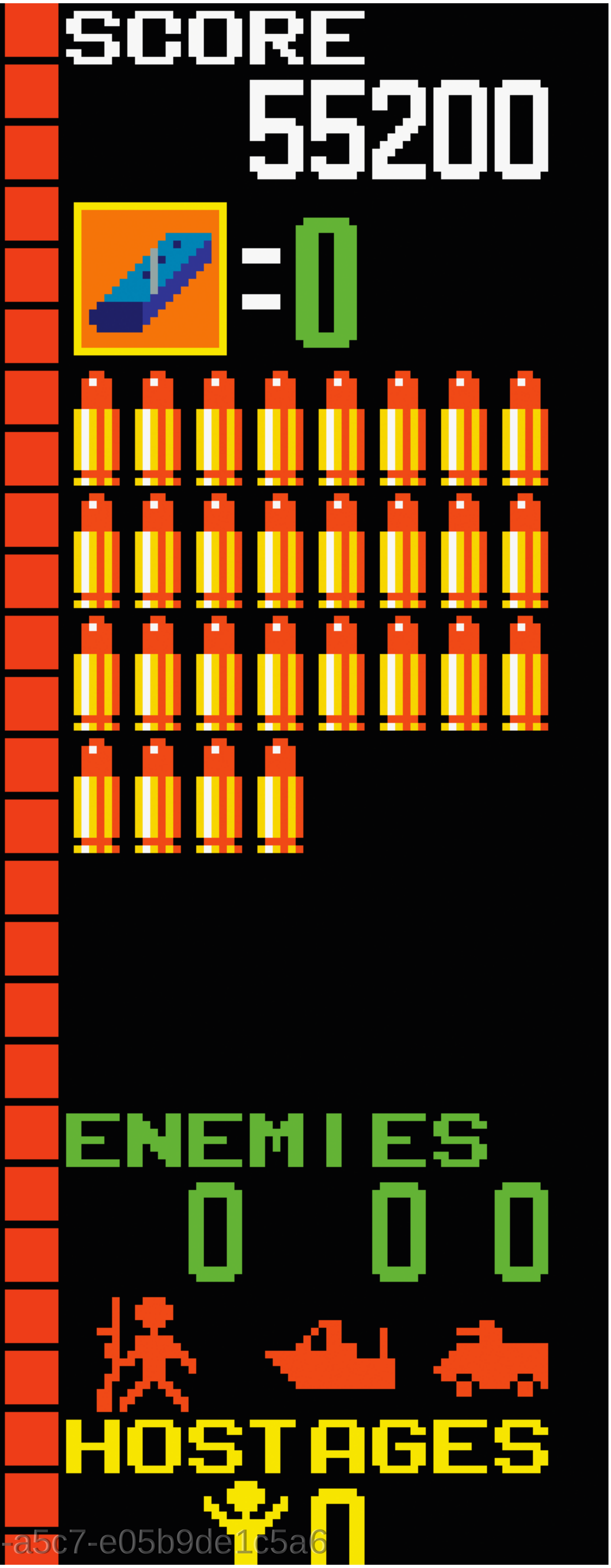


There's a reason why many helicopters get blown out of the sky in Hollywood movies: the blast is very satisfying! Finding yourself on a bonus level in which you battle against a host of choppers is therefore a real thrill.

Tense Times



There's nothing like the moment when you realise you're a few hits away from death and spot an energy bottle. Even better when you spy an animal: yes, it goes against our gentle nature but shooting them gives you ammo.



THE MAKING OF

INDIANA JONES and the LAST CRUSADE

THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

WHEN GEORGE LUCAS AND STEVEN SPIELBERG WANTED TO TAKE INDY FROM THE BIG SCREEN TO CRT MONITORS IN CINEMATIC STYLE, THEY KNEW WHO TO CALL. WE SPOKE WITH THE LUCASFILM GAMES TEAM WHO HELPED SHAPE THIS POINT-AND-CLICK CLASSIC

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** LUCASFILM GAMES

» **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES

» **RELEASED:** 1989

» **PLATFORM:** PC, VARIOUS

» **GENRE:** POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE

In the autumn of 1988, bosses at Lucasfilm Games handed Noah Falstein a highly confidential, unfinished script of the third *Indiana Jones* film. The brief? To design a graphic adventure that followed the events of the film, and to finish up in time for the premiere the next summer. "I was pretty overwhelmed by the responsibility," Noah admits.

Noah was an experienced game designer by this time in his career and certainly no stranger to pressure. Four years earlier he had become one of the first ten employees of Lucasfilm Games after it was founded by *Star Wars* creator George Lucas. He had also just successfully produced the flight simulation action game *Battlehawks 1942* for the company. But despite having no shortage of good ideas about how to make an *Indiana Jones* adventure game work well, this was a big project with a hard and fast deadline. "I think by early December 1988 I went to Steve Arnold, our boss (and still a good friend) and told him I couldn't get the game out close to the summer 1989 movie launch without a lot of help."

At this point two other esteemed game designers, who Noah says also remain his good friends, step into the story. Ron Gilbert paused work on what would later become *The Secret Of Monkey Island* to join the fold. David Fox had just finished *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* and joined the project too. Noah told us this was just the backup he needed. "Ron, David and I were the three most-experienced project leaders at Lucasfilm Games. That was a title that meant lead programmer, producer and designer all in one. So it was a big commitment to put us all on one game." Noah says the three were fully devoted to crafting a game that would fit with the cinematic nature of the source material. "Pretty much every one of us had come to the company because we were carried away by *Star Wars* and wanted to make games that measured up to the standard set by Lucasfilm for movies. We loved stories and aspired to tell them with our games."

Together, the team designed an adventure game that would span many memorable scenes from the film, taking Indiana Jones from the catacombs of Venice to a gothic castle in Berlin as he searched for the Holy Grail with his father. Alongside some challenging point-and-click puzzles, there were also opportunities to get into fistfights, which Noah says were inspired by the sword-fighting sections of *Sid Meier's Pirates*. However, these boxing sections could also be avoided if you could manage to talk your way out of an encounter. *Last Crusade* was the very first Lucasfilm adventure game to feature these branching dialogue options when you spoke with characters, and it was also the first to contain alternative puzzle solutions and different endings. Depending on your choices during the game, you could rack up varying numbers of points, known as your IQ or 'Indy Quotient' score. The feature gave the game replay value, as players could return to the

▶

» Noah Falstein has worked for Lucasfilm Games and as chief game designer at Google.

Maniac Mansion

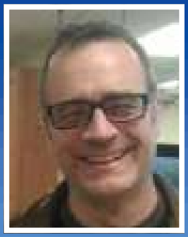
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1990

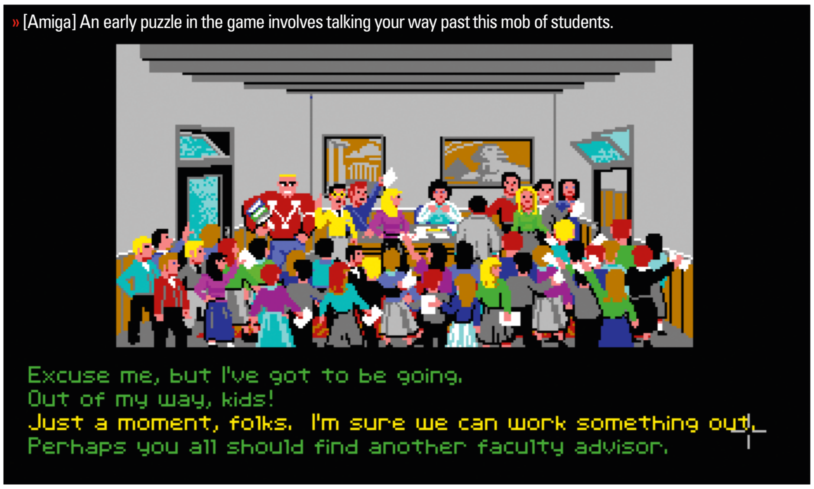
INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1992

» David Fox recently programmed *Return To Monkey Island* and is a Lucasfilm Games veteran.



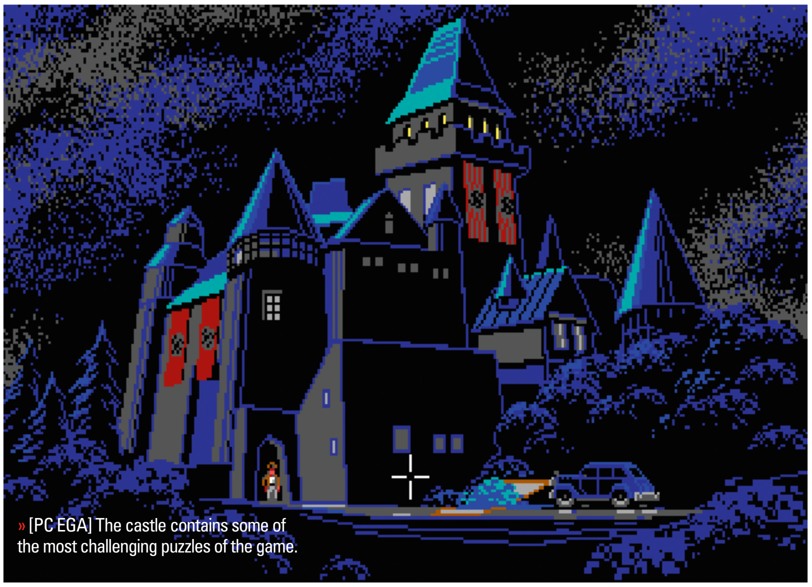
» Michael Ebert is a senior game designer at Blizzard and a former Lucasfilm Games artist.

» [Amiga] An early puzzle in the game involves talking your way past this mob of students.

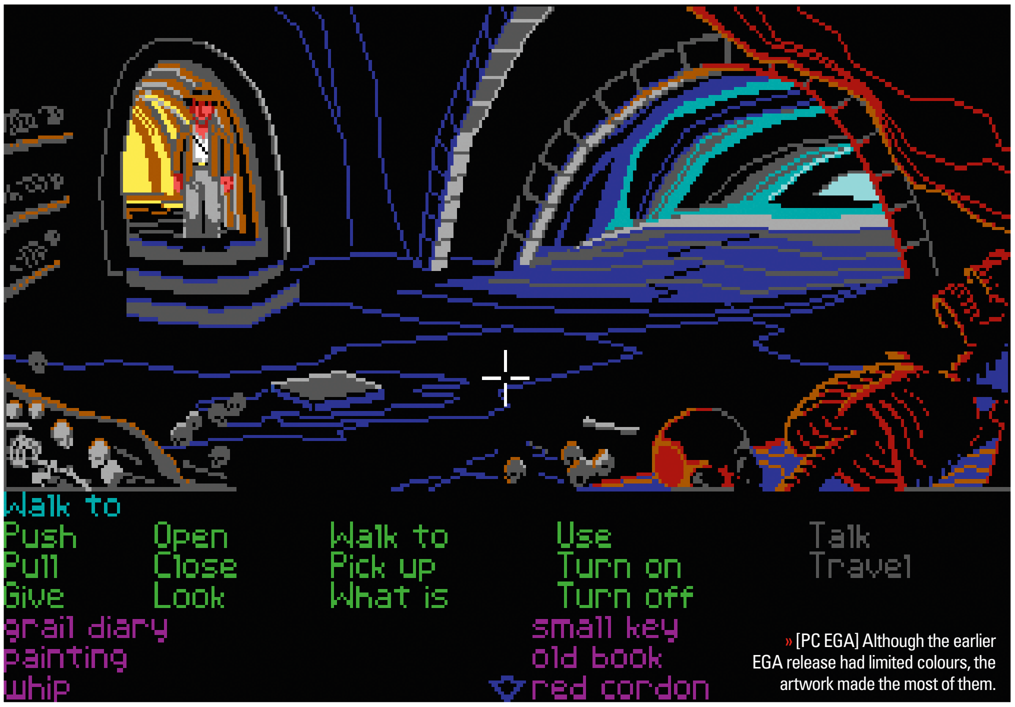


Excuse me, but I've got to be going.
Out of my way, kids!
Just a moment, folks. I'm sure we can work something out.
Perhaps you all should find another faculty advisor.

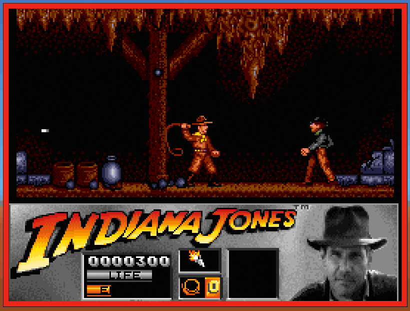
> **"WE LOVED STORIES AND ASPIRED TO TELL THEM WITH OUR GAMES"**
> **NOAH FALSTEIN**



» [PC EGA] The castle contains some of the most challenging puzzles of the game.



» [PC EGA] Although the earlier EGA release had limited colours, the artwork made the most of them.



MAN OF ACTION

THE OTHER LAST CRUSADE GAMES

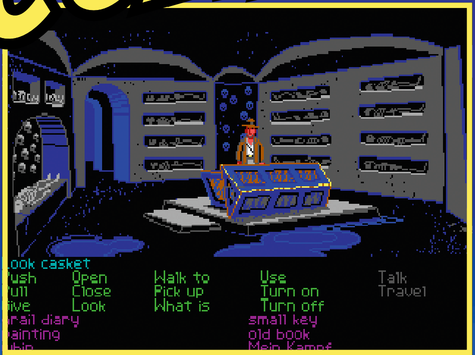
■ Lucasfilm Games published an entirely separate *Last Crusade* game in the same year as the graphic adventure. *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade: The Action Game* was developed by Tiertex and released on various platforms, including some that missed out on the graphic adventure such as the NES, Commodore 64, Master System and even the Game Gear. Despite having levels based around scenes of the film, such as Venice and onboard a zeppelin, the game eschewed storyline in favour of more straightforward platform-and-punch action. Reviews across platforms were highly mixed, from 35% in *Commodore Format* to a more respectable 85% in *CVG* for the Master System game.

David says the team was aware the other game was happening. "I think having two games with almost the same name added confusion to the market. I wish they hadn't done it."

Just to confuse things further, a third, lesser-known *Last Crusade* game was created for the NES by Taito in 1991. This time it had nothing to do with Lucasfilm. Combining action with puzzles and racing segments, it included some interesting bitmapped graphics of the film's actors and seems to have been slightly better reviewed than Tiertex's game.

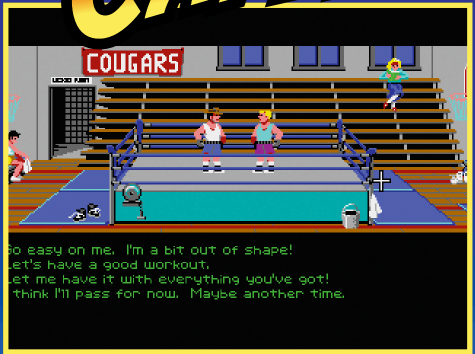
CONVERSION CAPERS

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES



PC (EGA)

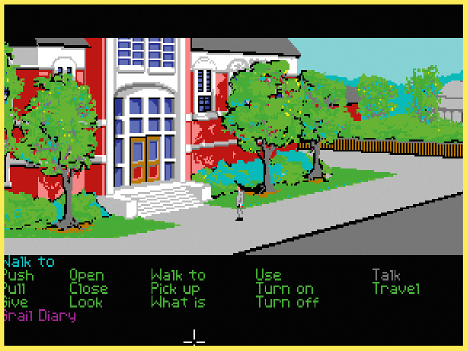
■ Indy swung onto the PC with a solid 16-colour EGA release. The graphics did a fantastic job of bringing the film to computer screens, despite lacking the detail and vibrancy of later incarnations of the game. The tinny theme tune is charming too.



o easy on me. I'm a bit out of shape!
et's have a good workout.
et me have it with everything you've got!
 think I'll pass for now. Maybe another time.

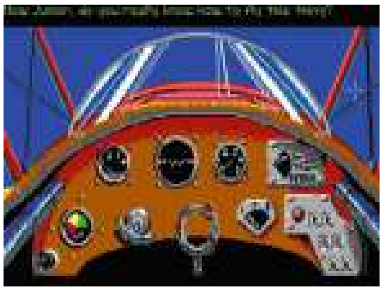
ATARI ST

■ *The Games Magazine* argued that the "magnificent graphics for both ST and PC are quite similar, with the obvious improvements to the ST's internal sound". But comparing versions, the ST and Amiga graphics seem stripped back from the PC game.

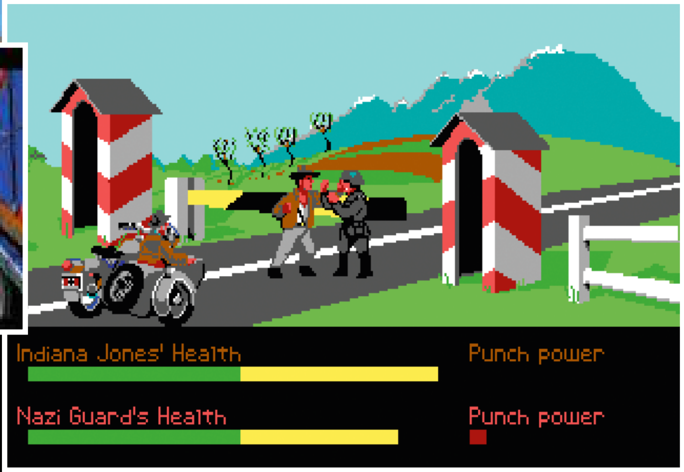


AMIGA

■ The Amiga game came on three floppy disks, which was more manageable than the later *Monkey Island 2* with its infamous 11 disks. An Amiga CDTV version of *Last Crusade* was released in 1992, but only in Germany.

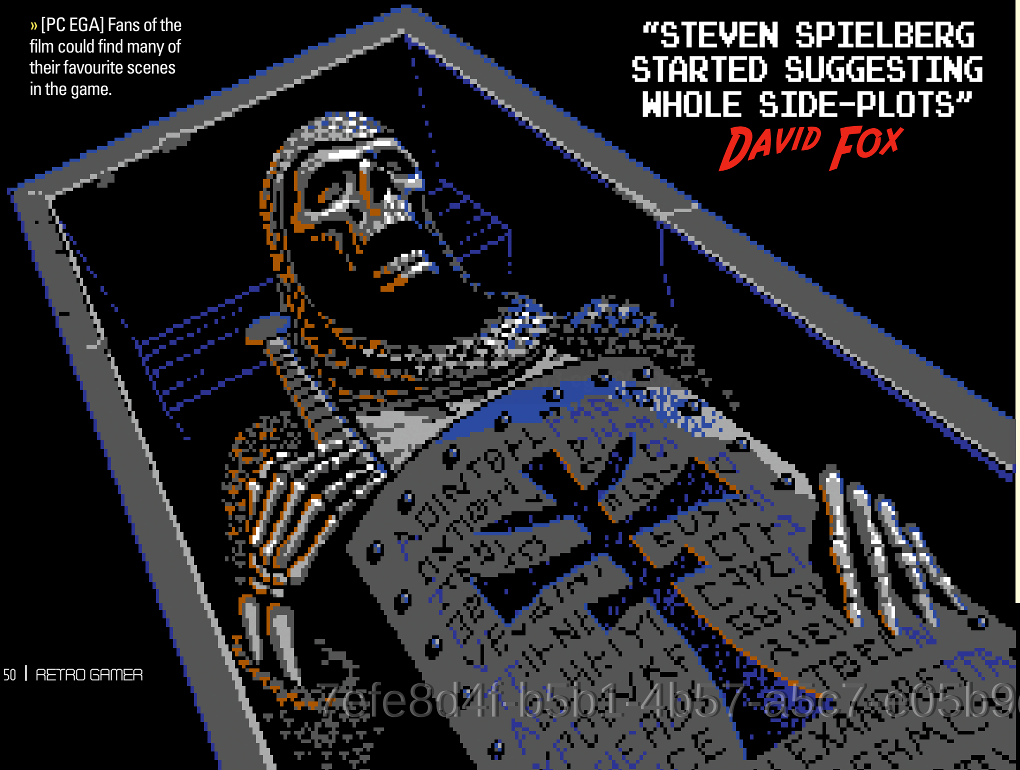


» [PC EGA] The biplane scene was inspired by the film and Noah's work on *Battlehawks 1942*.



» [PC EGA] The fighting gameplay was inspired by sword fights in *Sid Meier's Pirates*.

The shield is the second marker Donovan spoke of!



» [PC EGA] Fans of the film could find many of their favourite scenes in the game.

"STEVEN SPIELBERG STARTED SUGGESTING WHOLE SIDE-PLOTS"

DAVID FOX

▶ action and try out different paths to beat the score from their last playthrough.

To add to the sense that your choices in the game had real consequences, the team wanted it to be possible for Indy to die. But they weren't initially confident about George Lucas and Steven Spielberg allowing their star of the big screen to perish. A meeting to discuss the game at Skywalker Ranch, the secluded California estate in which George Lucas and Lucasfilm Games worked, would give them a chance to find out. David Fox recalls the group convening in a lounge area with sofas and a roaring fire. "I remember it as a very casual meeting," says David. "We really only had a few questions to ask. 'Can we kill Indy?' 'Yes.' 'Can we deviate from the movie and its script?' 'Yes.' In fact, Steven Spielberg started suggesting whole side-plots of going to South America and I don't remember what else. We gently pushed back on that, since we already had a major task on our hands to try and wrap up the game before the film came out six months later. But we were all proven game designers, and I don't think there was any doubt that we could come up with a great game."

David remembers the design team working together like a well-oiled machine. "All of the gameplay and puzzles were co-designed by Ron, Noah and myself. We locked down the designs, and then each took chunks of it to implement. I know that Noah did most of the dialogue trees. Ron did the engine upgrades and the boxing user interface and gameplay. I think he probably did the biplane minigame as well. I probably wired up a large percentage of the rooms, and I think I did the follow code, having Henry [Indy's father] follow Indy."

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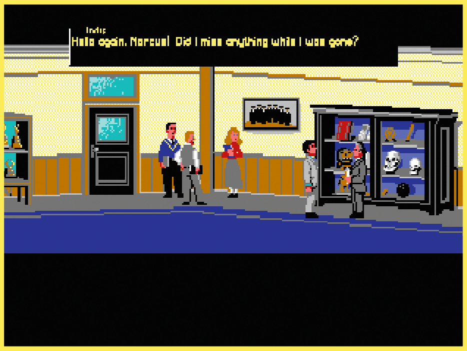
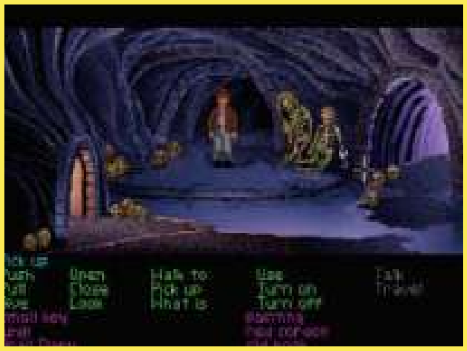


Indy:
Hello again, Marcus! Did I miss anything while I was gone?

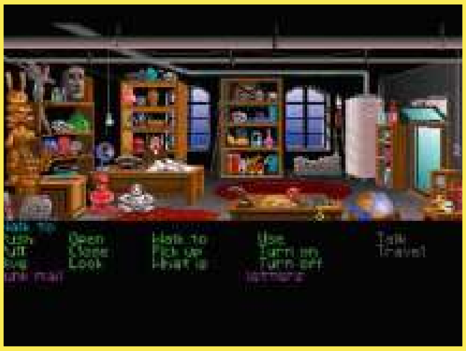
MACINTOSH

■ High-resolution fonts and rectangular speech windows give the Macintosh release a distinctive look and feel, changing the appearance of the dialogue and the SCUMM menu. Otherwise, there's little difference from the other 16-colour versions.


Open
Close
Look
Walk to
Pick up
What is
Use
Turn on
Turn off
Talk
Travel

PC (VGA)

■ The 1991 VGA release for PC really allowed the details of the artwork to sing. Take a tour of the catacombs for some impressively detailed background illustrations. The sound is much better too, although it's still synthesised.


Open
Close
Look
Walk to
Pick up
What is
Use
Turn on
Turn off
Talk
Travel

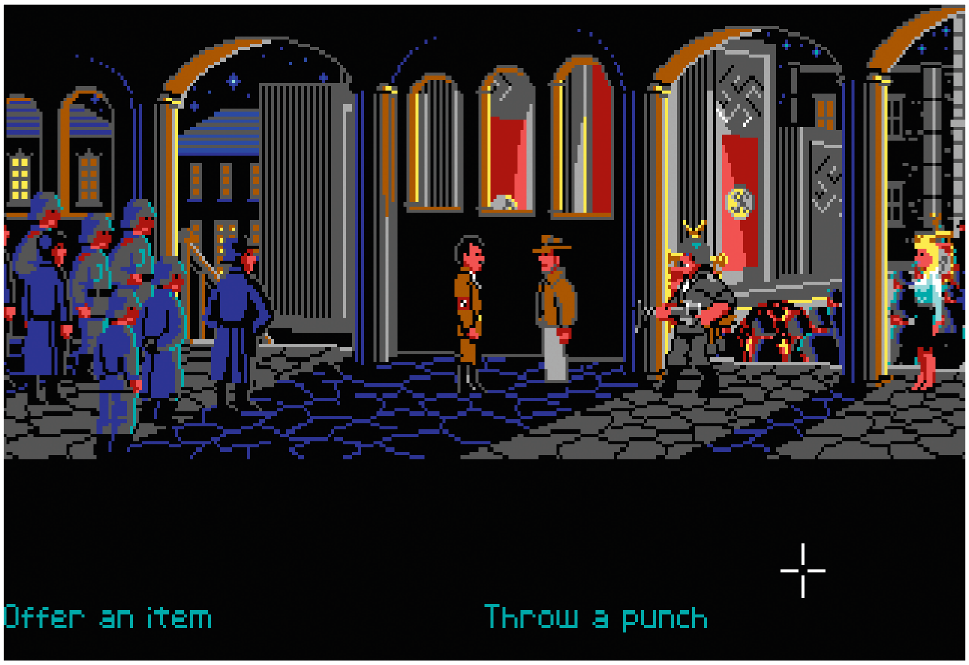
FM TOWNS

■ The most cinematic experience of all is the FM Towns release, which features high-quality CD audio recorded by a chamber orchestra. Graphically the PC VGA version is very similar, but that soundtrack really takes things to another level.

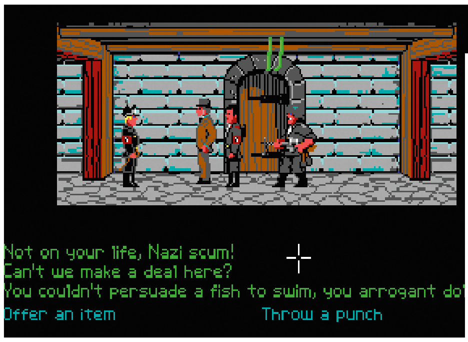
Among David's fond memories of the game are some clever pieces of animation work. "I was especially proud of the new 'Special Case Animation' we used in this game, showing some of Indy's skill with the bullwhip, or his leaping from one place to another. The game screamed for those kinds of action sequences."

Animations like these were worked on closely with a small team of artists including Michael Ebert. Nowadays working for Blizzard, and with designing *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* among his credits, Michael recalls *Last Crusade* fondly as being his very first job in the videogame industry. He secured the role after applying with a mouse-drawn illustration of Indy. "Everything about the job excited me," he says. "I could not believe I was working on videogames and working at Skywalker Ranch." Michael says he looked up to and learned from Steve Purcell, who was the senior artist working on the game and who works for Pixar these days. "Our office was in a small building styled after an old carriage house, at the back of Skywalker Ranch. We had a back door in our office that just opened onto countryside. Steve Purcell would go outside and practise with a bullwhip. I remember we'd all try using the whip without hitting ourselves in the face. Our lunches were in the dining hall of the main house at the ranch. We would often see George Lucas or other celebrities eating at tables next to us. I was always told the food was prepared by an ex-chef from [prestigious California restaurant] Chez Panisse. I realise now that we were kind of spoiled!"

Michael says that by the time he started on the project, "A lot of the fancier establishing shots were already finished. I remember working mostly on the castle and zeppelin backgrounds, ▶


Offer an item
Throw a punch

» [PC EGA] Throwing a punch here is tempting, but unsurprisingly, it leads to Indy's demise.

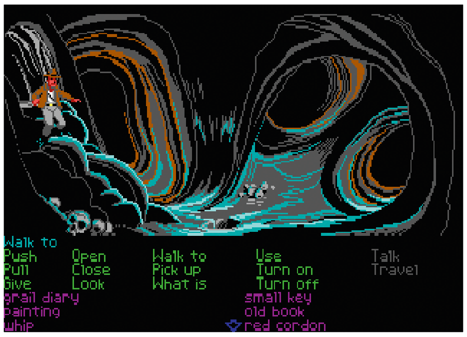


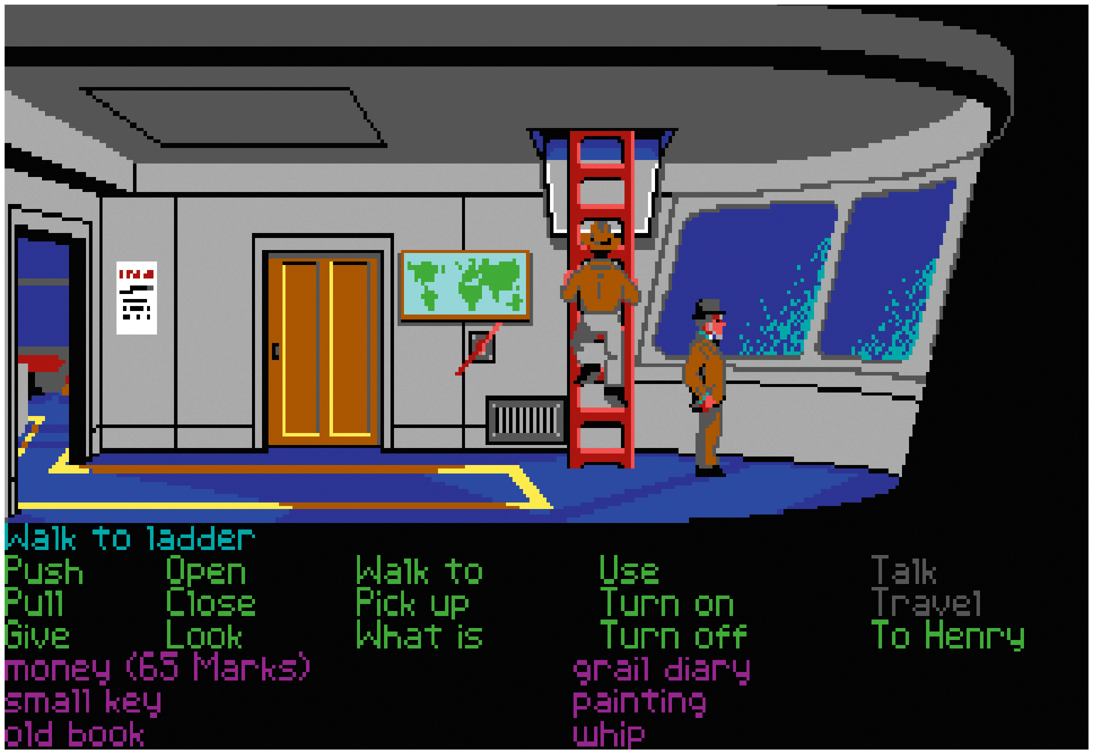
Not on your life, Nazi scum!
Can't we make a deal here?
You couldn't persuade a fish to swim, you arrogant do

Offer an item
Throw a punch

» [PC EGA] The game was the first Lucasfilm adventure to feature branching dialogue.

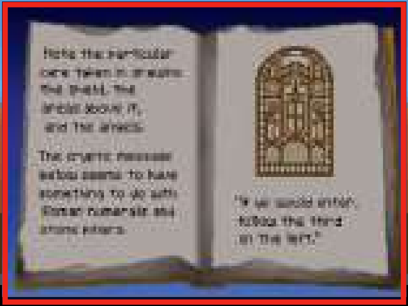
» [PC EGA] David Fox says he was proud of animated segments like this rock slide.


Walk to
Push
Pull
Give
grail diary
painting
whip
Open
Close
Look
Walk to
Pick up
What is
Use
Turn on
Turn off
small key
old book
red cordon
Talk
Travel


Walk to ladder
Push
Pull
Give
Open
Close
Look
Walk to
Pick up
What is
Use
Turn on
Turn off
Talk
Travel
To Henry
money (65 Marks)
small key
old book
grail diary
painting
whip

» [PC EGA] There are chances to switch between controlling Indy and his father after they reunite.

> **"WE'D ALL TRY USING THE WHIP WITHOUT HITTING OURSELVES IN THE FACE"**
> *MICHAEL EBERT*



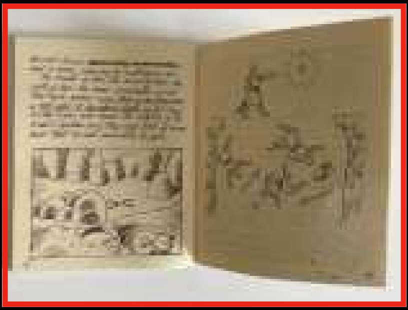
DEAR DIARY

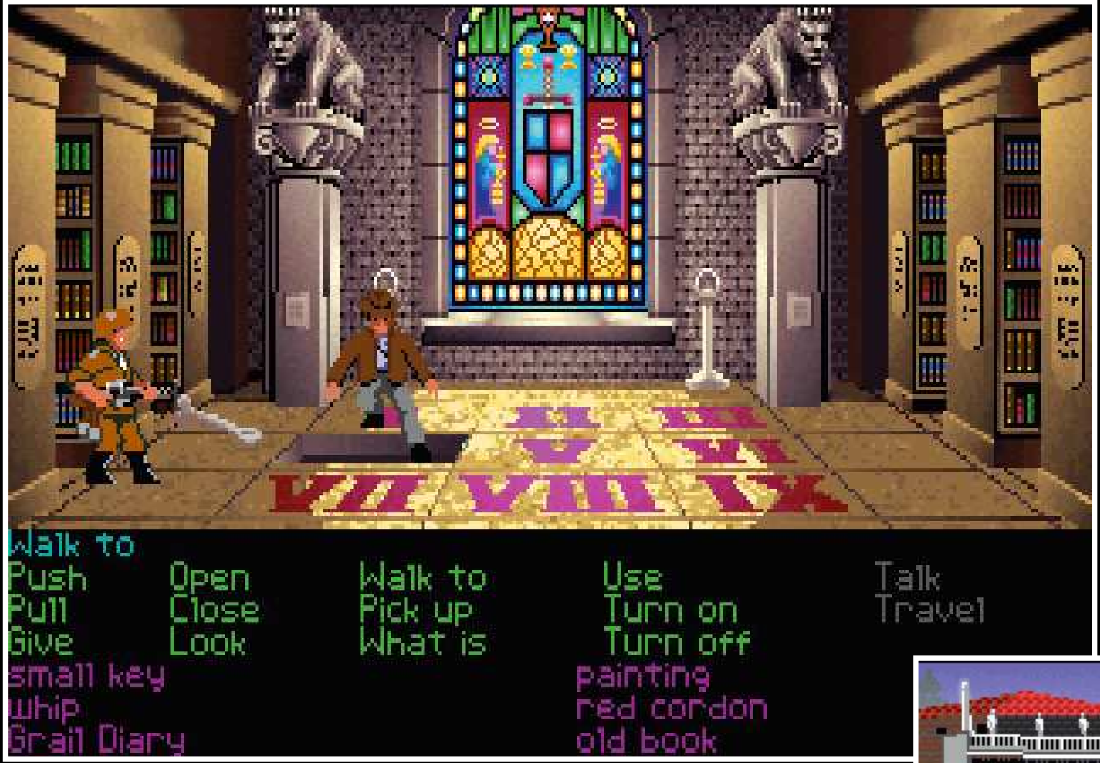
A PHYSICAL DIARY IS PART OF THE GAME

After unboxing the game, players would find a 64-page replica of the Grail Diary that features in the film. With a handwritten text style, cryptic drawings, coffee stains and a narrative about searching for the Holy Grail, it was a clever accompaniment that added another layer of depth to the experience, as well as acting as a form of copy protection.

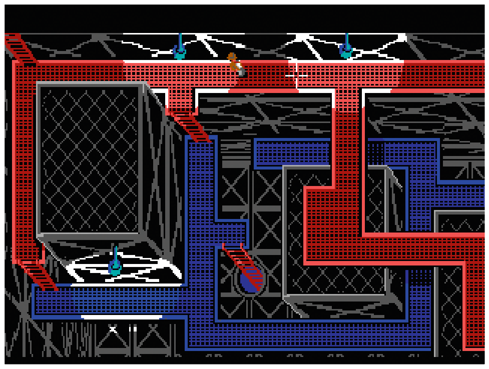
The design team didn't have too far to look for a writer either. "My brother Mark wrote most of the Grail Diary, which we included for copy protection and to make the game feel more connected to the movie," says Noah. "He had been a medieval history major and was doing freelance writing, so it was a great fit."

The Diary is written from the perspective of Indy's father Henry as he hunts for clues about the whereabouts of the Grail. At the end of the game, players need to choose the true Grail from several objects. The right Grail is determined randomly in the game, but descriptions in the Diary will tell you which to pick. Early in the game, you'll also add an in-game Diary to your inventory, which is again crucial for solving puzzles.

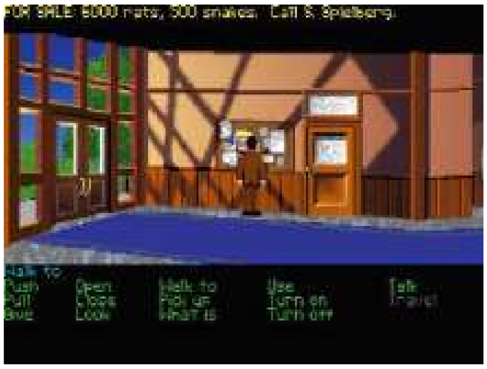



Walk to
Push
Pull
Give
Open
Close
Look
Walk to
Pick up
What is
Use
Turn on
Turn off
Talk
Travel
small key
whip
Grail Diary
painting
red cordon
old book

» [PC VGA] You'll need to study the in-game Grail Diary to solve this library puzzle.



» [PC EGA] The action switches to an overhead perspective for maze sections of the game.

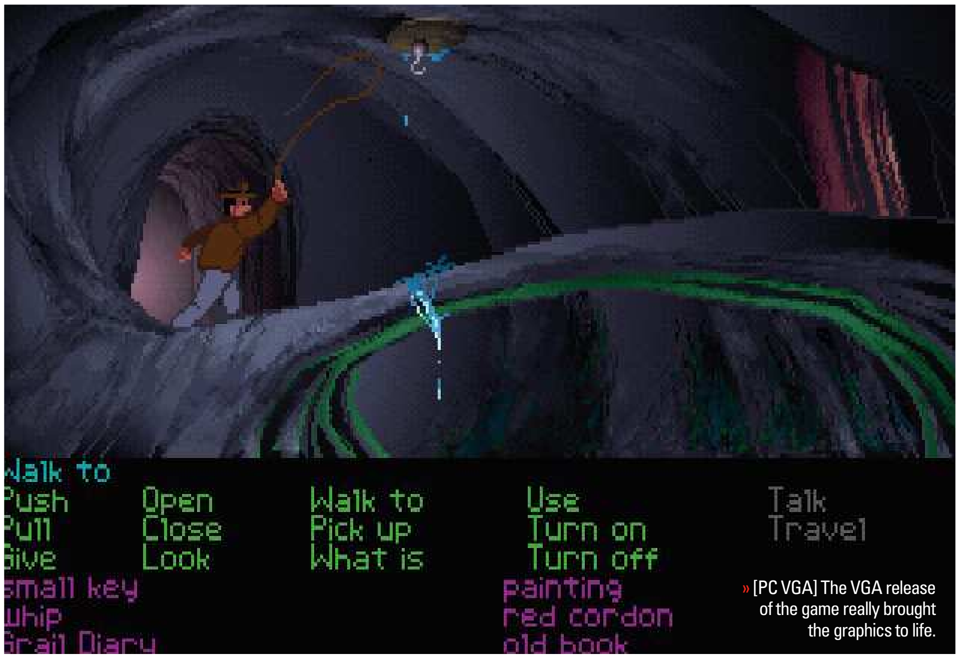


FOR SALE: 6000 rats, 500 snakes. Call S. Spielberg.

Walk to
Push
Pull
Give
Open
Close
Look
Walk to
Pick up
What is
Use
Turn on
Turn off
Talk
Travel

» [PC VGA] As usual from Lucasfilm Games, there's plenty of humour and in-jokes to be found.

Open
Close
Look
tape
metal post



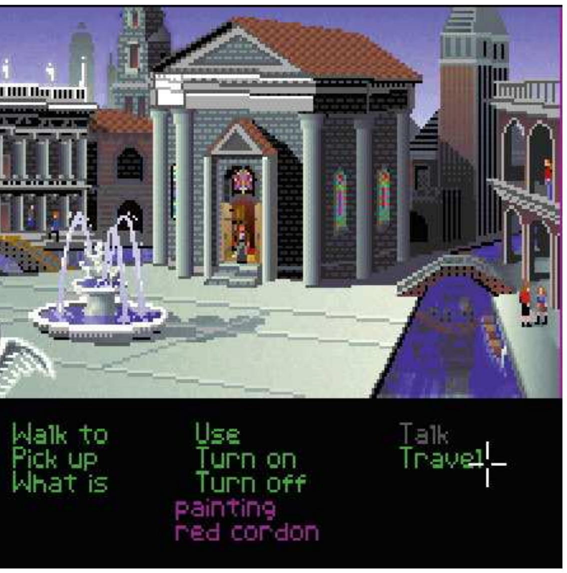
» [PC VGA] The VGA release of the game really brought the graphics to life.

Nazi soldiers and their animations, and also a lot of the top-down running-around sequences. I loved every moment of it. I definitely had the Lucasfilm fairy dust affecting me. The only part I probably did not like was just occasionally feeling like I was not worthy of the job, since my art skills were not up to some of the other artists. I just lacked experience!" Despite those feelings, Michael says the working environment was much more relaxed than others he'd experienced. "The designers on the game were very open to ideas, and we talked a lot about each part we were drawing, and what we could do to give them more to work with. I had to learn a lot by just observing what art techniques worked for Steve and the other artists."

Noah Falstein also remembers Skywalker Ranch being a special place to work. "Our building at Skywalker was modelled after a horse stable. We tried not to be offended. They thought that was the proper place for us! It had several gathering places that were perfect for hanging out and brainstorming – comfortable couches in front of huge fireplaces that were kept burning on cold rainy winter days, and a central courtyard built around a watering trough that was often a spot where conversations happened in warmer weather."

Another innovation that came during development was the addition of 'Look' and 'Talk' to the menu of verbs that had by now become a steady part of Lucasfilm adventure games. The menu system was underpinned by the SCUMM engine, which stood for Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion* after the game it was created for. "We were constantly tinkering with what SCUMM could do, experimenting with many different aspects," says Noah.

David agrees. "I think each SCUMM game we did was much more complex (in some ways) than the previous ones. Having dialogue trees opened up a whole new way for the player to interact. Since it was based on a movie that had lots of dialogue, we felt this would be a great way to add humour and highlight Indy's irreverent personality."



At one point in the game, Indy has the opportunity to explain his presence to a Nazi guard by saying he's "selling these fine leather jackets". It was the origin of an in-joke that adventure game fans might be familiar with from its appearance in the *Monkey Island* games, *Full Throttle* and *Thimbleweed Park* among others. David is unsure exactly who came up with the line. "It feels like Noah's humour. The inspiration for it came from the Indy bomber jackets that everyone at Lucasfilm had an opportunity to purchase. I still have mine. Maybe we were being hounded, 'If you don't get your deposit in soon, you won't get your jacket.' And it found its way into the game."

Completing the game in time for the launch of the film would prove a stretch, but the team managed to get it into shops while the film was still showing at cinemas. "We finished a couple of months after release," David remembers. "Six months was a very short development time for an adventure game back then. But we still made sure it was a great game. No corners cut. We did all get to go to a Hollywood screening in early May, a few weeks before the film came out. We noticed at least one sequence and puzzle we had in the game that had been cut from the film: Indy dealing with the zeppelin radio operator. There's a line in the film that makes no sense without that scene, but it does if you've played our game."

The game was a critical and commercial success, earning nine-out-of-ten and five-star reviews, and selling better than any Lucasfilm game to date. Steven Spielberg was also a fan. Noah received a phone call from Steven, who had his son sat on his lap, for some tips getting past a tricky puzzle. "George [Lucas] was not and never became a big game player. But Steven was, and for many years after I know he played videogames frequently. I would expect he still does. His oldest son who sat on his lap while he played *Last Crusade* and called us for hints has been a professional game developer for many years now."

In 1992, Noah would follow the game up with the much-loved sequel *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*. "I really like games that can be played in different ways by different types of players. I pushed to include that in *Fate Of Atlantis*, refining what we'd started to do in *Last Crusade*. It took a lot of work to do multiple solutions and endings." Noah later heard that Louis Castle had been inspired by the games branching paths with his *Blade Runner* game in 1997. "I was delighted to hear that he'd been motivated in part by my work."

Ideas from the game would also make their way into *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, which Ron and Michael worked on after finishing *Last Crusade*. And at the time of writing, Ron, David and Dave Grossman have just released the long-awaited *Return To Monkey Island*, in which the legacy of the original SCUMM engine games like *Last Crusade* lives on. (You can read more on page 88.)

How does Noah feel about the possibility of another adventure starring Indy? "I actually talked to Ron and David about that idea when I first heard there was a new movie in the works, back in 2016. We did a little research, but ultimately decided it wasn't worth pushing for it." He does however concede though that leaders at Disney seem approachable to the idea of such reboots. Whether Indy returns for one last adventure game crusade or hangs up his hat, his place in point-and-click history has been well and truly earned. *

TIME LEFT
SCORE:
LEVEL 1

Electrocop

JUST PUT IT AWAY ALREADY

» LYNX » 1989 » EPYX

I absolutely adored Atari's Lynx and took it everywhere with me. Never mind the fact that it guzzled batteries as easily as Winnie The Pooh went through honey or that all my mates had Game Boys so I had no one to play multiplayer games with – the Lynx was amazing to 16-year-old me and everyone had to know about it. EVERYONE!

As a result I would get my Lynx out constantly in public places so that everyone could see I was holding the future in my hands. And let's be honest, the Lynx was an impressive piece of kit in 1989. I was the kind of idiot that would sit in the cinema during adverts, or at the front of the bus with my Lynx held high enough so that everyone could see it. I was simply proud of my new system, but in hindsight I must have come across as a right precocious pratt.

My go-to game for showing off the Lynx's capabilities was *Electrocop*. Sure, *Blue Lightning* was good, but *Electrocop*'s scaling as he ran into and out of rooms felt quite novel and it always got attention wherever I took my Lynx out. One day, though, I got more attention than I bargained for…

As I watched my grandad play snooker at his local club, a guy a few years older than me came over. "Give us a go," he said. "You've been waving that thing around all night." Before I could protest he'd snatched my Lynx right off me and proceeded to pass it around his friends, ignoring my requests to give it back.

It felt like an eternity before my grandad sorted things out and my Lynx was safe in my hands, but it taught me an important lesson and I never took my Lynx out in public again. *

T: 58:49:44
375

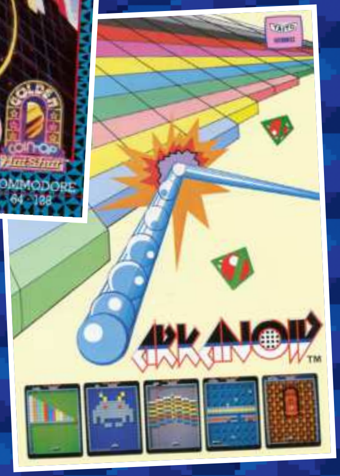
THE HISTORY OF ARKANOID

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS PONG, AND PONG BEGAT BREAKOUT, AND BREAKOUT BEGAT ARKANOID, AND THUS A GENRE WAS BORN INVOLVING BATS, BALLS, WALLS AND… LASERS? JOIN US AS WE CHRONICLE THE HISTORY OF THE SERIES FROM ITS GLORIOUS PAST TO THE PRESENT DAY

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

ARKANOID
DISCOVERY SOFTWARE
TAITO
ARKANOID
TAITO COIN-OP
Imagine
the name of the game
COMMODORE 64 · 128

» While most home-computer versions were released under Ocean's Imagine label (left) the US Amiga release (above) was by Discovery Software.



» *Arkanoid*'s arcade flyer demonstrates the action you can expect from the game while also showing off some of the game's many different levels.

As successful gaming concepts go, few are as basic or as brazen as *Arkanoid*. Taito simply took Atari's *Breakout* from 1976 and updated the graphics and the gameplay for the Eighties, adding various enhancements including that staple of the era, the power-up. As you smashed away at the wall, certain bricks would drop capsules that upgraded your bat, turning it into a block-blasting laser gun for instance, or altering the ball in some helpful manner. A backstory was added too, where it was revealed that the walls were the defences of a dimension-warping entity named Doh who you'd face on the 33rd and final round.

The embellishments were well executed, but at its heart *Arkanoid* was still ball versus wall, just like the ten-year-old *Breakout*. Yet it would defy expectation and become one of Taito's most profitable coin-ops. In Japan, where it debuted in July 1986 as a cocktail cab, it was the highest-grossing table during the second half of 1986 and *all* of 1987. In the US, where it was distributed by Romstar predominately in kit form, it was named as 1987's 'most played conversion kit' at an industry event. In Europe it was reportedly the third most-popular coin-op of 1987. This was the kind of global hit that Taito hadn't truly seen since the days of *Space Invaders*.

The success of *Arkanoid* surprised everyone, chief amongst them being the game's co-creator Hiroshi Tsujino. Speaking to the Japanese magazine *EXTRA*, Tsujino revealed that the idea for *Arkanoid* actually came from a client who suggested to Taito's management that an updated block-breaking game would resonate with gamers. "At the time the block-breaking boom had long since passed, and the reaction of the development team, myself included, was, 'Huh?'" Undeterred, Taito ordered its developers to submit design proposals for the game and two were chosen – one from Tsujino, and another from his colleague and friend Akira Fujita. The two designs were then combined, with Fujita taking charge of design and planning, and Tsujino working on the graphics, screen layouts and overall look of the game. "I watched a lot of sci-fi movies for reference, and *Tron* in particular had a great influence on me," he revealed.

Although their bosses were behind the project, it was viewed internally as a kind of quirky experiment. They were assigned two programmers and the four of them were given just one month to develop the game on low-cost, low-spec hardware (basically a simple Z80-based setup). Tsujino described the tight schedule as "murderous" but they managed it. "We were able to reach the location test in one month from the start of development," he said. "I was filled with a sense of accomplishment, but at that time I did not think it would cause such a boom. The income was much higher than expected."

In the US, Romstar responded to the game's surprise success by releasing an upgrade kit in January 1987 titled *Tournament Arkanoid*. This was the same game as the original only with a set of new, extra-fiendish screens. The idea was that this kit would tide gamers (or let's be honest, operators) over until a proper sequel arrived – which it duly did in June that year. By this point, Tsujino and Fujita were busy working on other Taito projects, so the task of updating the game fell to Kei Shimizu who wisely refrained from messing with the winning formula. *Revenge Of Doh* introduced several new power-up capsules, including a Mega-ball which would smash through everything, even the usually

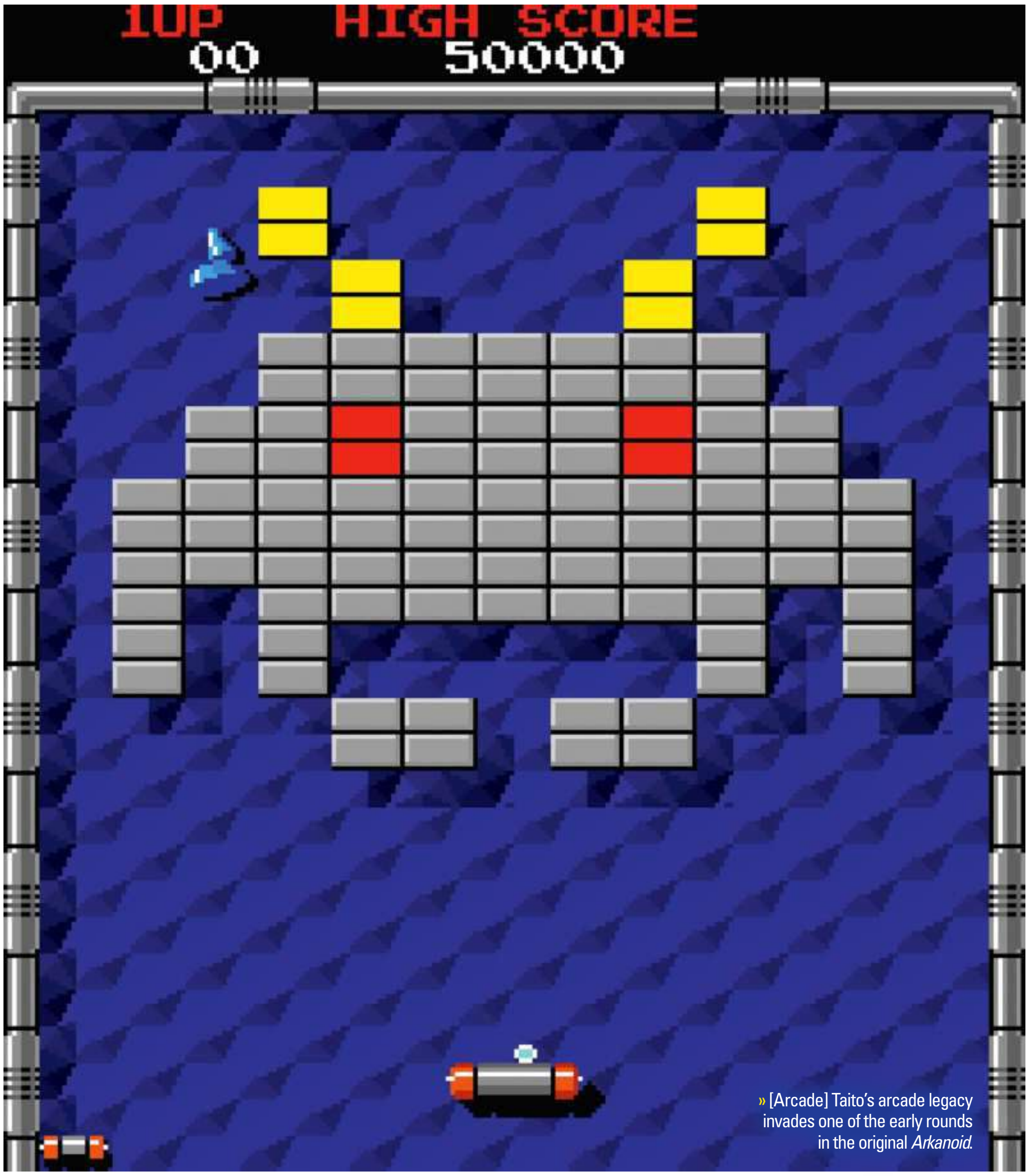
7efe8d4f-b5b1-4b57-a5c7-c05b9de1c5a6

» Howie Rubin brought *Arkanoid* to the NES while working on behalf of Taito America.

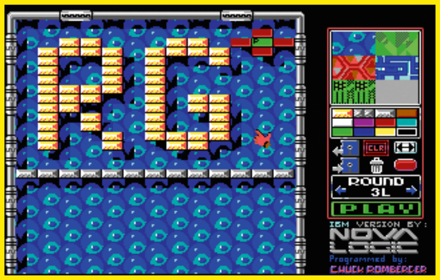
» James Higgins worked on two *Arkanoid* conversions for Ocean Software.

» Chuck Romberger converted *Revenge Of Doh* to the PC during his time at NovaLogic.

> **"THE NES BUSINESS WAS BRAND-NEW TO ALL OF US AND WE WEREN'T SURE IF CONSUMERS WOULD PAY FOR A SINGLE-USE NEW CONTROLLER"**
>
> **HOWIE RUBIN**



» [Arcade] Taito's arcade legacy invades one of the early rounds in the original *Arkanoid*.

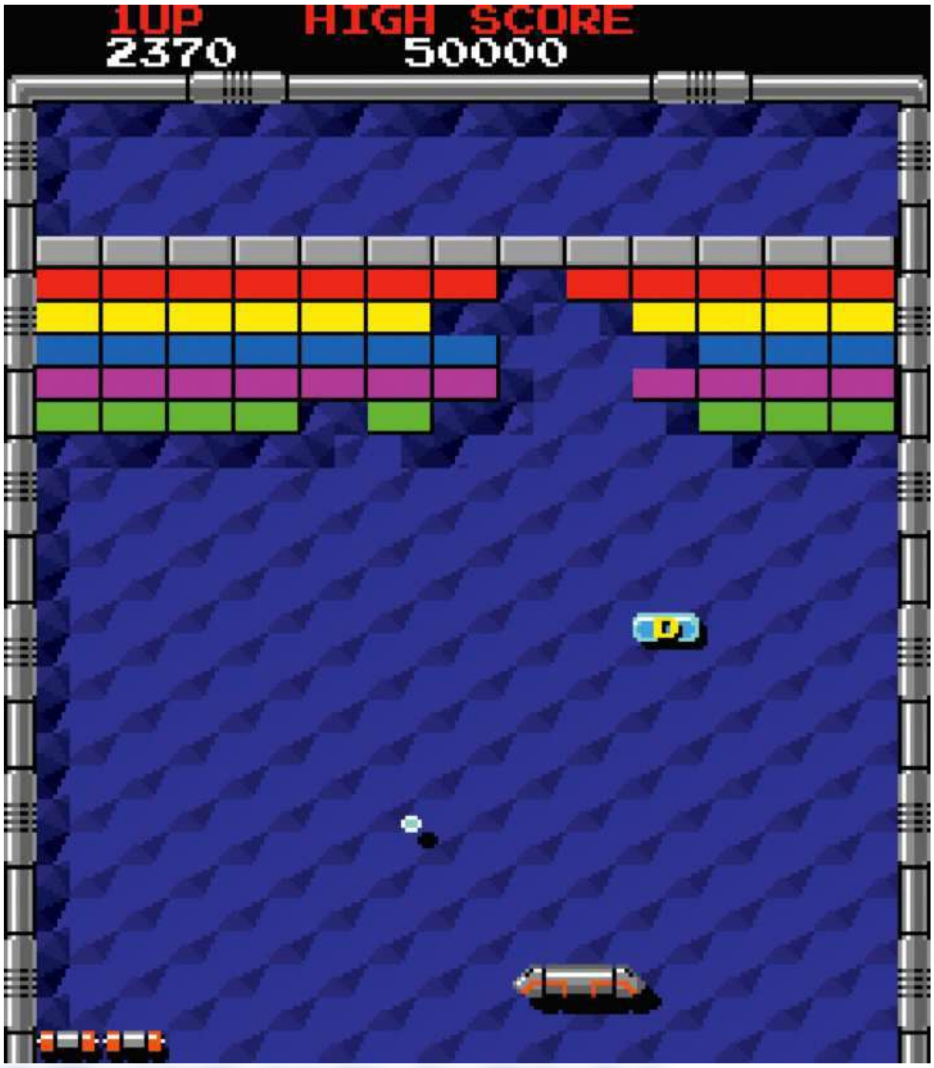


DOH IT YOURSELF

IF YOU GIVE PEOPLE BLOCKS THEY'LL BUILD SOMETHING

The *Arkanoid* coin-op includes a screen editor of sorts, buried in its code that's inaccessible by normal means. It's thought to have been used by the developers to speed up the creation of screens, yet it includes the message "Can you do better?" which suggests it was initially intended for people to use. Taito's challenge would soon be answered once the home versions were released and hackers started to inject their own screens. Some unofficial modding utilities were also distributed, such as the *Arkanoid Construction Kit* for the Atari ST and *Arkanoid Level Editor* for the Commodore 64. As a result, if you look in game archives online you'll find the likes of *Arkanoid III*, *IV* and *V* for multiple systems. These mods feature their own custom level sets, with one common feature – they are all really bloody difficult! It seems that when people build their own screens, they like to frustrate players with gold and silver bricks aplenty.

For *Revenge Of Doh*, Taito did add screen editors to several home conversions. The MSX2 and NES versions include rudimentary screen editors, while on PC and Apple IIGS you'll find fully-featured editors that lets you easily create your own oh-so-devious level sets.

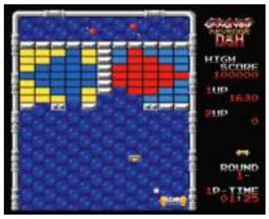


» [Arcade] Those pesky silver bricks are introduced in the very first round, lining the top of the wall.

indestructible gold-coloured bricks. There were two new brick types as well – regenerating ones and moving ones. As for the story, it was revealed that Doh had been resurrected by a 'vicious creature' and there were now three boss battles: the new heavy on round 17, then Doh on round 34, followed by the new heavy's true form. But the biggest change? There were now almost double the number of screens – 65 compared to the original's 33. You didn't have to play them all though, as they were arranged in two vertical columns which you could choose between at the end of each round (useful if one path saw you hitting a literal brick wall).

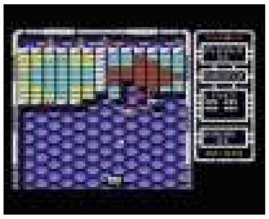
While Shimizu and his team were busy working on *Revenge Of Doh*, the original game started to infiltrate people's homes. The first conversion appeared on the Japanese Famicom, courtesy of Taito itself. To replicate the coin-op's rotary controls, it came with its own controller which was basically a plastic slab with a small spinner. The controller, which was perfect for playing the game, was also bundled with the North American NES version – but it very nearly wasn't, according to Atari and Gottlieb veteran Howie Rubin. "I was hired as a consultant to help Taito enter the NES business in the US and *Arkanoid* was one of the titles we picked from the small library of Japanese Taito games," he says. "It was a great game and a

CONVERSION CAPERS



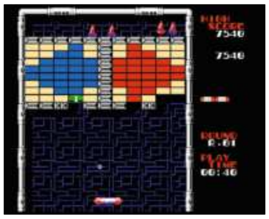
MSX2

■ The sequel skipped the standard MSX and was only released for the enhanced MSX2, which means that it looks amazing for an 8-bit game. It includes a *Pong*-style Versus mode and a screen editor, and also boasts its own controller featuring a mini spinner.



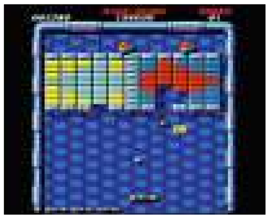
COMMODORE 64

■ There's little to dislike here: good graphics, excellent audio, mouse support, and it includes most of the coin-op's features (including the final boss fight). It's also the only 8-bit version to display the full screen width of 13 blocks (the others only show 11).



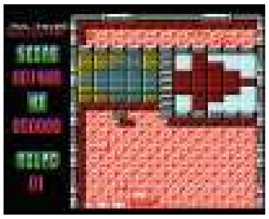
NES

■ Similar to the MSX2 version, in that it includes the same extras and has its own custom controller. Unique to this version is an odd power-up system where the capsules cycle through the different types once revealed, allowing you to 'choose' one.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ This version opts for a vertical-style display, with the score panel at the top, which is an authentic touch. The graphics are nice and colourful, and it plays really well. The only niggle? Silver blocks take four shots to destroy at the beginning rather than the usual two.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ An otherwise solid conversion is spoiled by the too-busy backgrounds that make it hard to see the ball (and that's kinda vital in this game). There's also a unique power-up that makes the background scroll – clever, but torture on the old peepers. A shame.

great follow-up to *Breakout*, but there were lots of arguments about the controller which was surely needed to play the game to its fullest."

Unsurprisingly the arguments came down to cost. "I can't remember the prices but the internal arguments centred on gameplay versus adding additional costs to the retail price. The NES business was brand-new to all of us in the States and we weren't sure if consumers would pay for a single-use new controller. Taito Japan allowed us to make the call and we went for the controller. I believe the price point hurt sales, but I also believe it made *Arkanoid* a much better game. It was the right choice."

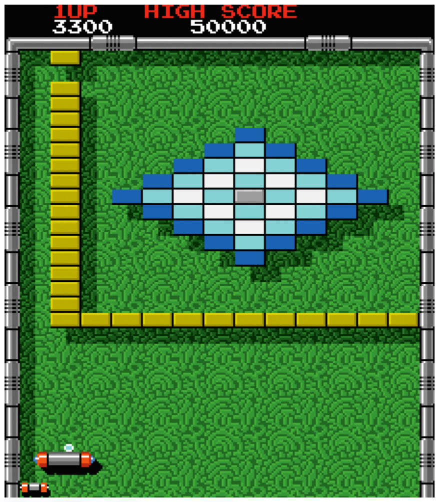
In Europe, Ocean Software developed a number of home-computer versions and published them on its Imagine label. No special controller was ever considered, but the Atari 8-bit version supported Atari's paddle controllers and the Commodore 64 version could be controlled with either paddles or a mouse. The C64 game is perhaps most famous for its title music, a thumping, sample-heavy banger written by Martin Galway. "Yeah it was funky," says Mark K Jones, the game's graphic artist. "It was a bit, um, different but I liked it a lot. I revisited it just now and it brought back so many memories. Martin's music was always amazing. When he was out of the office we used to sneak into his music studio – well, the room with the synths – and play with his stuff."

Mark and programmer Dave Collier also spent a lot of time playing the *Arkanoid* coin-op which was housed in Ocean's 'arcade alley'. "My desk was next to the arcade room where we had all the arcade machines of the games we were converting. And yes we played *Arkanoid* a lot. I was actually videoed playing it all the way through so we had a reference for when we came to the C64 conversion. So imagine an old video camera on a tripod, set up over my shoulder as I played the game for hours at a stretch. We had a big VCR sitting on a desk which I'd fast forward and reverse to just the right spot, put it on pause, and then start copying the graphics as closely as possible. Those old VCRs didn't stay on pause for long so I had to work fast."

***Arkanoid* was the first game Mark worked on when he joined Ocean aged 18.** "I was actually an Amstrad artist," he says, "so I was a bit surprised to be given C64 *Arkanoid* for my first game. But that's what was available at that time." It was a similar story for his colleague James Higgins who answered the call when software manager Gary Bracey desperately needed someone to convert the game to the French Thomson MO5 computer. "I didn't hesitate to exaggerate my abilities and landed the gig," he says. "My first project for the Thomson had been *Green Beret* and I failed miserably to get that running at a decent framerate. *Arkanoid* was a simpler game but I was very inexperienced back then so even this was pretty tricky to pull off on the hardware. The Thomson has an awesome 6809 CPU but it had some quirks with its display that made fast updates difficult. I had to do all of the art too and Ocean sent me a video of the arcade game being played for reference. From that I just cloned it as best as I could. The hardest part was all of the art was created using a light pen. My arm still aches to this day."

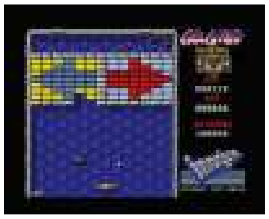
James would go on to convert several more games to the Thomson as a contractor, but ▶

> "I WAS VIDEOED PLAYING IT ALL THE WAY THROUGH SO WE HAD A REFERENCE FOR WHEN WE CAME TO THE C64 CONVERSION"
>
> **MARK K JONES**



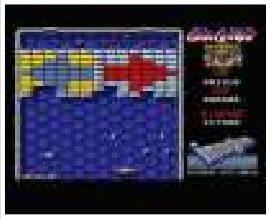
» [Arcade] Round 10 represents the first real difficulty spike. You just need to get the ball in the damn channel!

WE COVERED EVERY ARKANOID CONVERSION IN RG 145, SO LET'S LOOK AT HOW REVENGE OF DOH FARED ON HOME SYSTEMS



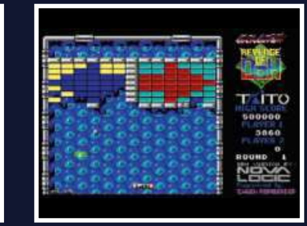
ATARI ST

■ Peter Johnson also wrote the original *Arkanoid* for the ST so this conversion was in safe hands. It looks great and includes everything – even the final boss, which is an absolute nightmare to defeat. Yep, we find that the whole game's a bit too tricky, even when using a mouse.



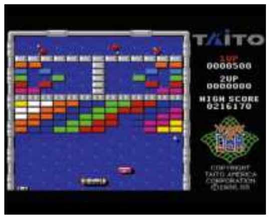
AMIGA

■ A straight port of the ST version so it looks and plays almost identically. This is usually the bit where we tell you it sounds better on the Amiga, but surprise – the overuse of shrill samples means that we actually prefer the softer sounds of the ST version.



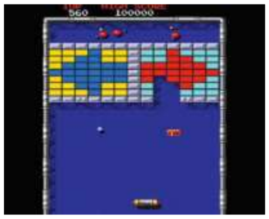
PC

■ *Arkanoid* on the PC was very basic, so it's nice to see the sequel looking much more in line with other versions (although the backgrounds could have been toned down a bit). It also includes an elegant screen editor (hit F9 while playing to access it).



APPLE IIGS

■ This is one classy conversion. It looks and sounds spot-on, and like the PC version, it includes a built-in screen editor (press C on the title screen to use it). One quirk – it's the only conversion to use the alternate level layout from the US coin-op.



SHARP X68000

■ This is as close to arcade perfect as you'll find. But when you have other conversions adding screen editors and extra modes, it does feel a bit bareboned. That's harsh maybe, as this is a superb version that channels the coin-op in pretty much every way.

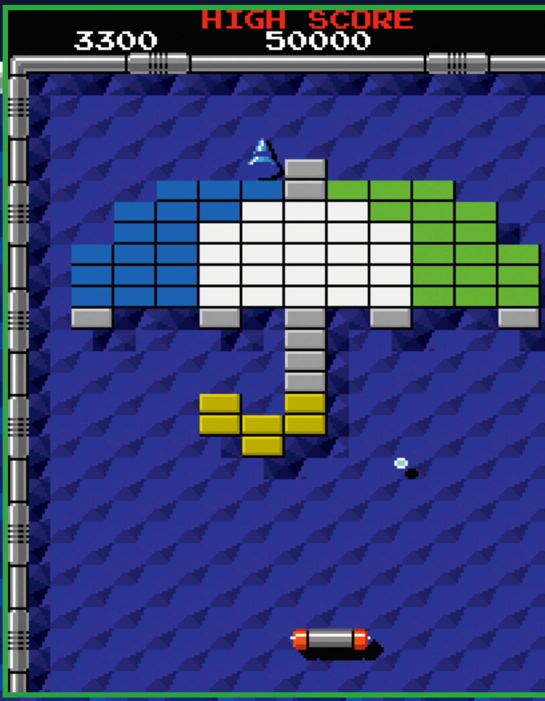
he wasn't quite finished with *Arkanoid*. The following year Ocean licensed *Revenge Of Doh* for a bunch of home computers and James was given the Amstrad CPC version to convert. "At that point I had just finished working on the CPC version of *Combat School* and Ocean asked me if I wanted a full-time job. I said yes and *Revenge Of Doh* was my next project. The only slight complication was that I think Andy Deakin and Ivan Horn were originally intended to work on it. Lots of the art decisions such as screen size and tile dimensions had already been made so I just had to roll with it." At least James was happy to have moved on from the Thomson. "The Amstrad was in a different league as far as the display was concerned. We were able to resize the screen to portrait format and use the four-colour Mode 1 for the score panel and 16-colour Mode 0 for the gameplay." Hidden in the game is a message where James references his 'rushed code'. Was *Revenge Of Doh* a bit of a rush job? "They were all rush jobs back then. *Revenge Of Doh* was maybe two to three months. *Green Beret* on the Thomson was eight weeks. I did *Arkanoid* in four weeks. You get the idea. There was very little time."

> "THEY WERE ALL RUSH JOBS BACK THEN… I DID ARKANOID IN FOUR WEEKS"
> JAMES HIGGINS

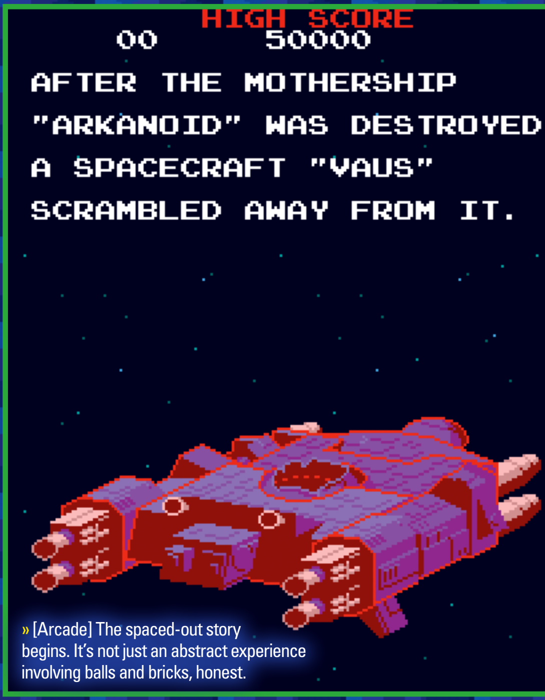
Revenge Of Doh was converted to ten different home systems – not quite as many as the original's sixteen. They were also less faithful on the whole, with many introducing their own quirks and extra features (see Conversion Capers for a rundown). The NES and MSX2 versions – which were titled *Arkanoid II* – bizarrely *began* with a boss battle with Doh. Several other versions went the other way and removed the final boss fight against the creature that had revived Doh, presumably due to lack of memory – or laziness. The most interesting additions were the editors that allowed players to construct their own screens and there was one built into the NES, MSX2, Apple IIGS and PC versions.

The PC version was coded by Chuck Romberger. "I left a business selling PC clones and moved to LA and got a job at NovaLogic," he says, referring to the firm that handled most of Taito America's PC conversions. "My first project was *Revenge Of Doh* in 8086 assembler. A Taito game was a fun career move, even if it was just *Breakout* with bells on or one-player *Pong*. I was given the full plans from Taito and played the arcade version enough to have the right feel for the product. The interesting part for me was the code for beam chasing. In order to run at 60fps the balls and paddle were updated directly on the screen while the blocks were done with traditional page flipping. My version was mostly identical to the arcade version but with the addition of the screen editor, which I designed. The editor was part of the original spec, but not the design of it or how it worked. I used the screen space next to the game to house the editor elements and controls."

The PC and Apple IIGS were the last conversions to arrive in 1989 and at the time few would have guessed that they'd be the last titles to carry the *Arkanoid* name for almost eight years. Indeed, the ending to the Spectrum version included the jokey message, "Doh has been blown to bits and that's your lot until *Arkanoid III* comes along." By the time the official third game did arrive in 1997, the Spectrum and its 8-bit brethren were long gone. It's not clear why Taito pushed pause on the series for so long, but as *Arkanoid* ▶



» [Arcade] A reference to the round-warping umbrella from *Bubble Bobble* maybe?


HIGH SCORE
00
50000

AFTER THE MOTHERSHIP
"ARKANOID" WAS DESTROYED
A SPACECRAFT "VAUS"
SCRAMBLED AWAY FROM IT.

» [Arcade] The spaced-out story begins. It's not just an abstract experience involving balls and bricks, honest.

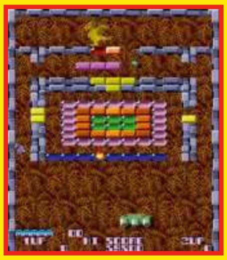
ARKANOID-ESQUE

THESE CLONES WASTED LITTLE TIME IN CASHING IN

GIGAS

ARCADE • 1986

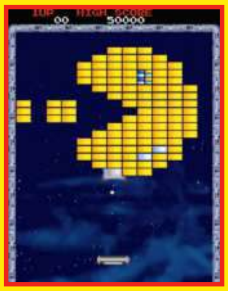
■ Sega jumped straight on the bandwagon with this flashy clone that appeared in Japanese arcades just three months after *Arkanoid*. The main difference is that you can choose the direction of your initial launch, making it slightly easier to play.



QUESTER

ARCADE • 1987

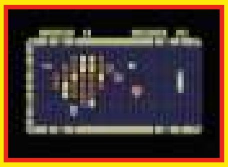
■ Arriving a year after *Arkanoid*, Namco's copy was painfully close to its inspiration. Its unique twist was the introduction of switches that would either speed up or slow down the ball. Besides that it didn't add much of note.



KRAKOUT

VARIOUS • 1987

■ While Ocean was busy converting *Arkanoid* to numerous home systems, Gremlin was rustling up this effective clone that flipped the action onto its side. The excellent Commodore 64 version is pictured, but all versions provided solid competition for Ocean's official effort.



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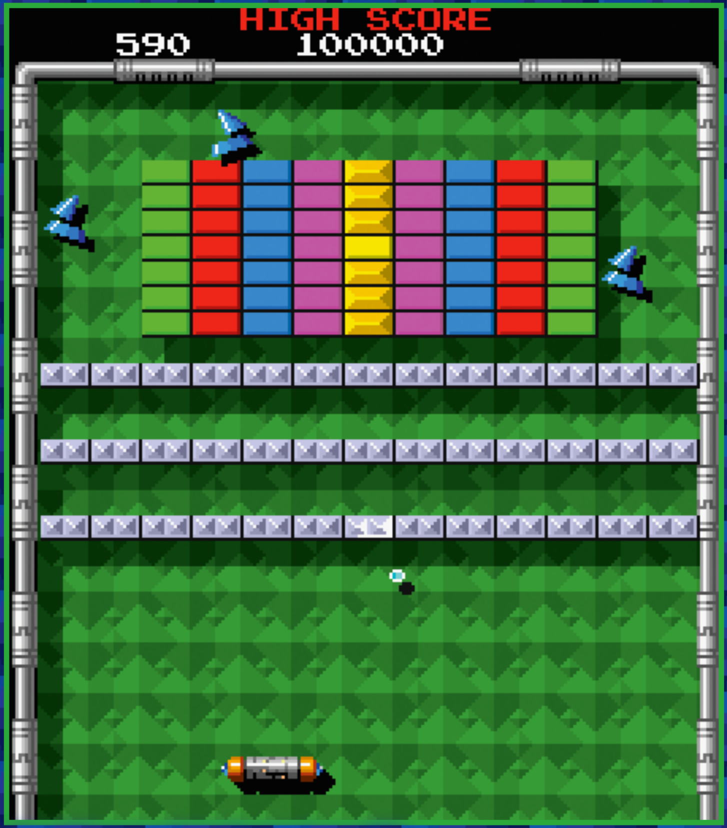
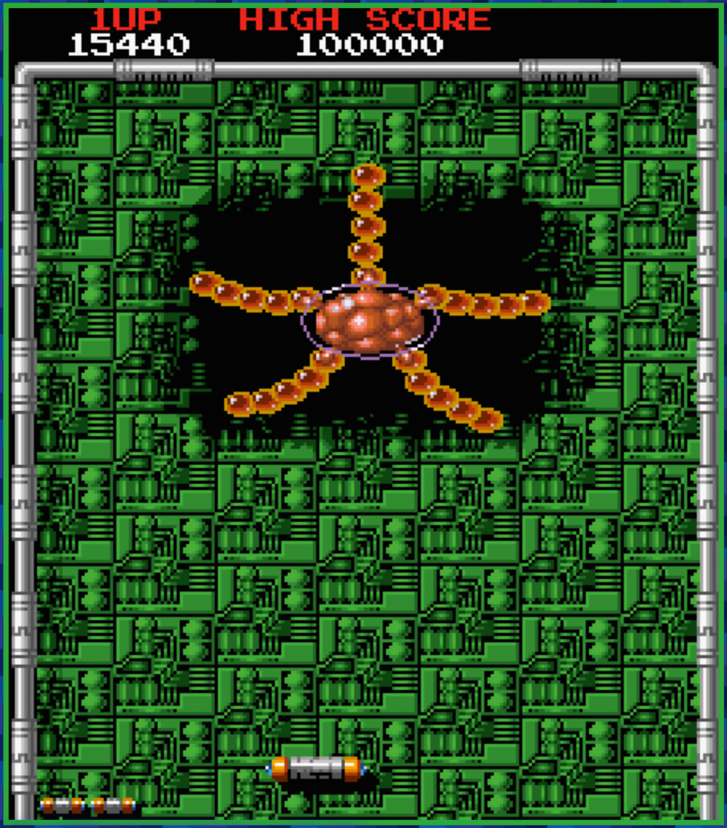
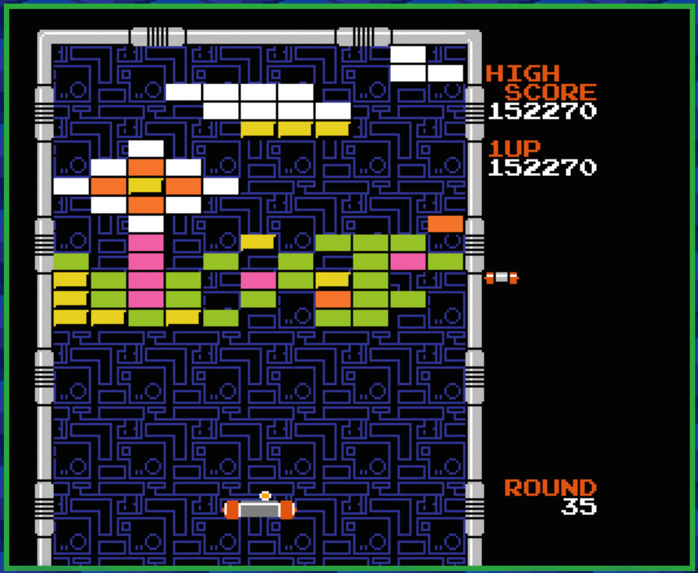

HIGH SCORE
590
100000

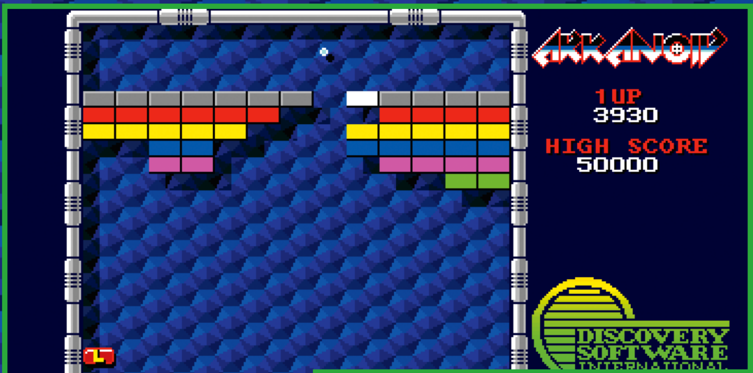
» [Arcade] The most maddening thing about the sequel? The 'notched' silver bricks that regenerate after a few seconds…


1UP
15440
HIGH SCORE
100000

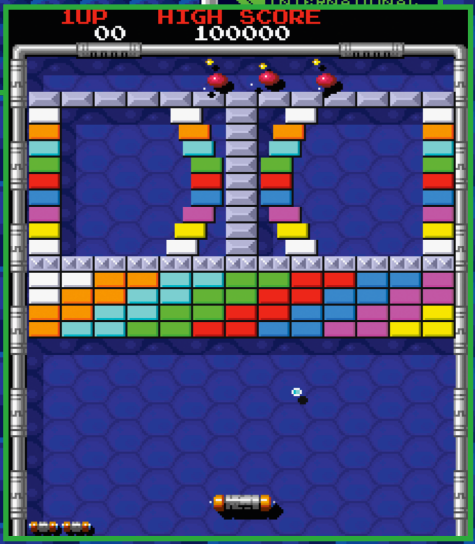
» [Arcade] After defeating Doh in the sequel, the alien that revived him makes a surprise second appearance.


HIGH SCORE
152270
1UP
152270
ROUND
35

» [NES] The Nintendo conversion of the first game featured three extra rounds before the Doh battle.


ARKANOID
1UP
3930
HIGH SCORE
50000
DISCOVERY SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL

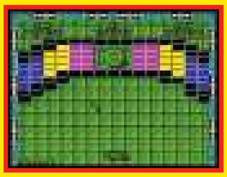
» [Amiga] Developed by Discovery Software, the Amiga conversion of *Arkanoid* is brilliant, bordering on arcade perfection.


1UP
00
HIGH SCORE
100000

» [Arcade] For reasons unknown, the US version of *Revenge Of Doh* features an alternative, more difficult opening round. The first boss also appears at a different point in the game.

BATTY

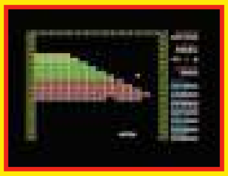
ZX SPECTRUM, CPC, C64 • 1987



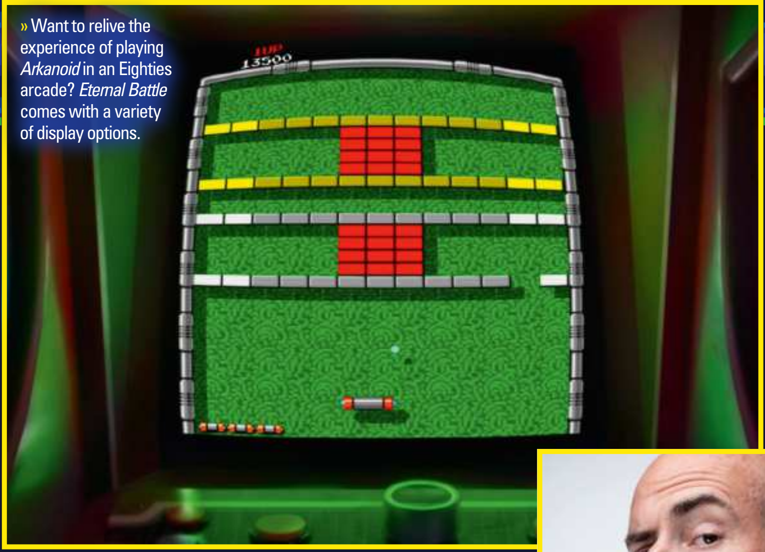
■ This was so close to *Arkanoid* that publisher Elite chose to release it on a compilation (and in the case of the Speccy version, gave it away on a magazine covertape!) rather than risk Ocean's wrath. This just made it all the more appealing and essential. It's a great game as well.

ARTHUR NOID

COMMODORE 16 • 1988



■ While Elite played it safe with its own take on *Arkanoid*, Alternative went down the spoof route with this neat budget clone from Shaun Southern, who deserves credit for managing to cram 32 stages and loads of power-ups into just 16K. The title itself also deserves an award.



» Want to relive the experience of playing *Arkanoid* in an Eighties arcade? *Eternal Battle* comes with a variety of display options.

REMAKING ARKANOID

» Pastagames' founder and owner Fabien Delpiano, aka "the final boss". (Photo: Marco Castro)

WE CHAT WITH FABIEN DELPIANO OF PASTAGAMES, THE SMALL FRENCH STUDIO BEHIND ARKANOID: ETERNAL BATTLE

Are you and the developers fans of the original *Arkanoid*?

Pastagames is home to a bunch of old-timers who spent their teenage years in arcades, fascinated by *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble* and of course *Arkanoid*. When Taito and Microids called us and asked us whether we were interested in making a new *Arkanoid*, it was a no-brainer.

What can you tell us about the main Eternal Battle mode?

When asked what our take would be on a modernised version of *Arkanoid*, we immediately thought, "Let's go multiplayer!" Arcade games were intrinsically social experiences, with dozens of people crowded around every cabinet, learning the tricks, sharing advice, shouting and comparing their high scores. We wanted to keep this feeling alive by creating a competitive mode where 25 players are on the hunt for Doh.

How have you tried to appeal to veteran *Arkanoid* players?

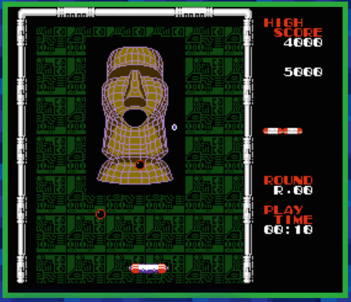
Our focus was being faithful to the original experience while taking advantage of what today's technologies allow. The first few months consisted of recreating the original 1986 arcade game in our online-ready engine. We did not want to emulate the original ROM and then "make it multiplayer", because this would imply not having an in-depth understanding of how it worked, and what made *Arkanoid* different from the other block-breaking games. In addition, the single-player Neo mode and the Eternal Battle mode share the exact same controls as the 1986 version. We also spent a lot of time working on the gamepad controls, because we know that this is the way most people will play the game.

Have any new power-up capsules been added?

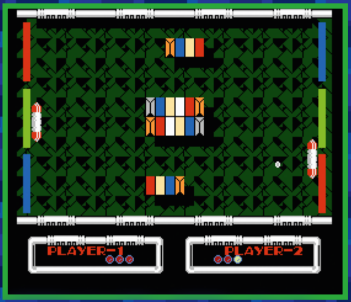
This has been a controversial topic among the team. Being true to the original *Arkanoid* meant not going crazy on new gameplay additions. We did add a few new power-ups that are very natural like the 'huge' item that increases the size of the energy balls, and unique 'space walls' that give you gameplay boosts if you manage to break them. Another evolution is that the item capsules can now co-exist and combo together, so you can upgrade your current item by catching a second capsule of the same kind – enhanced laser, aiming sticky Vaus… all of these are so satisfying.

Do you think this is the ultimate *Arkanoid* game?

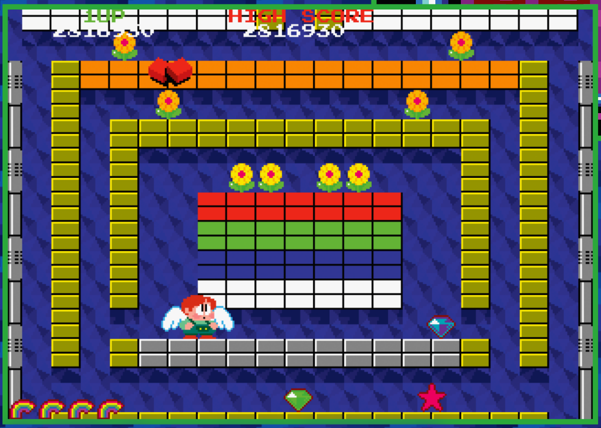
Arkanoid is here to stay and there will be tens of other incredible *Arkanoid* games in the future. *Eternal Battle* has the ambition to be an important step in making *Arkanoid* a great online game.



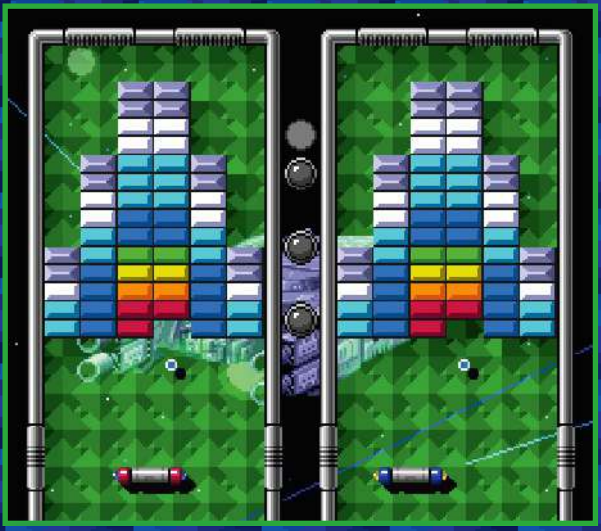
» [NES] What's this? Round 00? The NES version of *Revenge Of Doh* literally begins with the revenge of Doh.



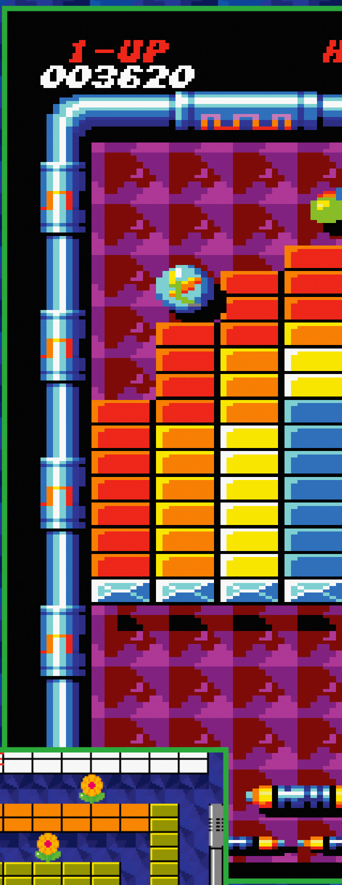
» [NES] Both the NES and MSX2 versions of *Revenge Of Doh* include a *Pong*-style Versus mode.

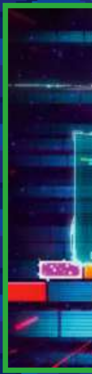


» [Arcade] *Arkanoid* crosses over into the world of *Bubble Bobble*. Here's Doh's Island, the fifth world from *Rainbow Islands*.



» [SNES] *Doh It Again* features a split-screen versus mode where you compete against another player, to see who can survive the longest.





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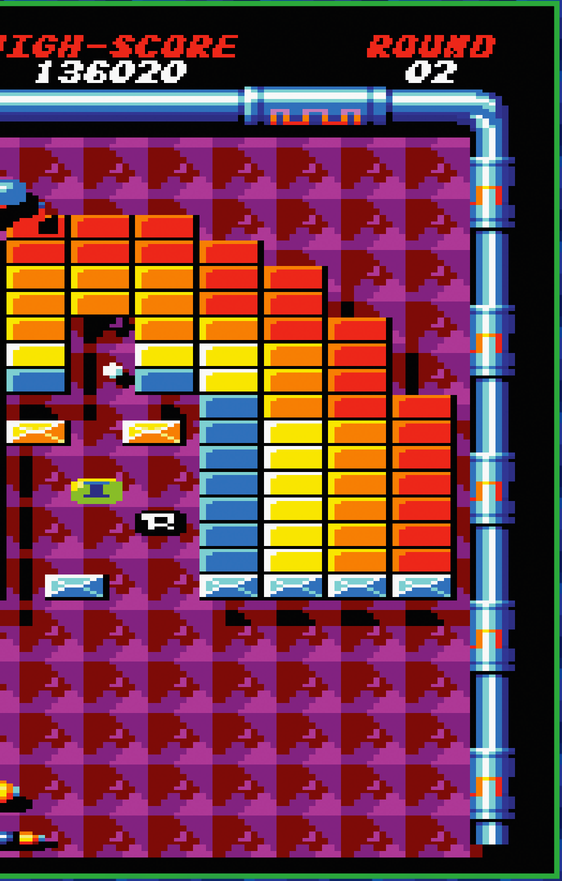
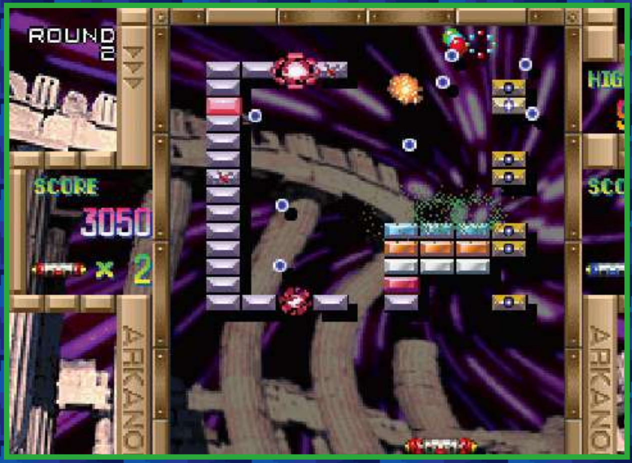
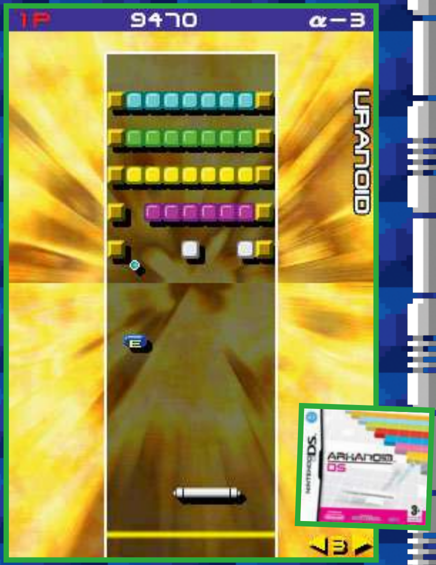


» [Amstrad CPC] The Amstrad conversion of the sequel was no lazy Spectrum port. Look at all that lovely colour.



» [Arcade] Two players take on Doh's challenge once again in the belated arcade sequel *Arkanoid Returns*.



» [DS] The Nintendo DS game includes an unlockable Uranoid mode which features 35 extra rounds.

inspired so many clones, both in the arcade and at home, it perhaps felt that the market had become saturated. Certainly, *Revenge Of Doh* didn't achieve the same levels of commercial success as the original.

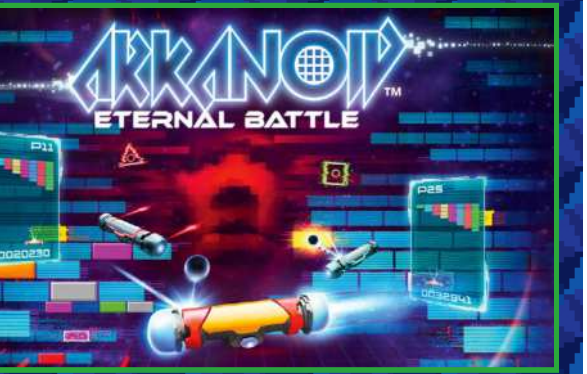
Like those proverbial buses, 1997 saw the release of two new *Arkanoid* games. The first was cutely subtitled *Doh It Again* and it was a late Super Nintendo exclusive (although it did form the basis for various mobile phone versions). Despite the intervening years, the game was surprisingly faithful to the look and feel of the coin-ops. There were more boss battles, appearing on rounds 11, 22, 33 and so on up to round 99, where you faced a super-sized Doh who would sprout arms and literally turns your world upside-down. A trio of two-player modes were also added, allowing you to play in-turn, together, or against another player. There was no custom controller but you could use the SNES Mouse. Arriving a few months after the SNES game was *Arkanoid Returns*, a new arcade entry that was less considered. There were some new power-ups, as you'd expect, and two could play simultaneously, but it was simply too fast and too difficult to be enjoyable. We're talking *Tournament Arkanoid* levels of frustration here. It was later ported to the PlayStation where it included an Extra mode featuring 100 new rounds and a screen editor.

> "A TAITO GAME WAS A FUN CAREER MOVE, EVEN IF IT WAS JUST BREAKOUT WITH BELLS ON"
> CHUCK ROMBERGER

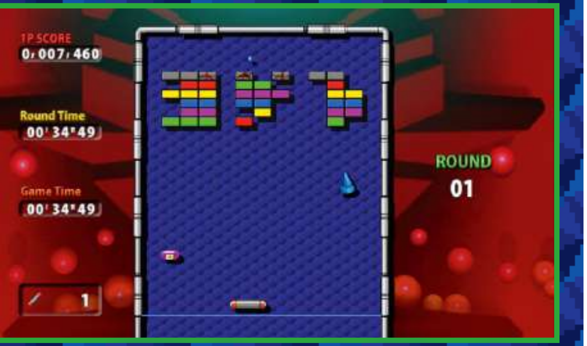
Following another long hiatus, the series returned on the Nintendo DS in 2008. *Arkanoid DS* was rejigged to work on the dual screens and the result was very narrow playfields featuring square blocks. In other words it felt a little off. The game originally came with its own spinner add-on that plugged into the GBA port and improved playability, but sadly it wasn't included outside of Japan. Two more games arrived the following year: *Arkanoid Plus* for Nintendo Wii and *Arkanoid Live* for Xbox 360. Both were digital downloads that received episodic DLC, and despite the different titles, they were essentially the same game (the 360 version did benefit from an online multiplayer mode). Most importantly, both titles offered classic *Arkanoid* gameplay for very little outlay.

More recently the series has become fused with Taito's own *Space Invaders* series. Released in 2017 for iOS and Android devices, *Arkanoid Vs Space Invaders* involved deflecting enemy fire at bricks and invaders. The game was later included in the *Space Invaders* collections for Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 4. A similar mash-up entitled *ArkInvaders* was released in Japan in 2018, only this was a huge floor projection 'experience' where players used their feet to deflect shots at the advancing invaders.

ArkInvaders supported up to ten players, yet the latest entry in the series, the just-released *Arkanoid: Eternal Battle*, invites 25 players to compete against each other in an online arena. Developed by Pastagames, the new game promises to move the series into the battle royale era while remaining true to its arcade roots. Whether it succeeds or not, one thing is certain: with the series now comprising at least ten distinct entries, bat-and-ball games are no longer *Breakout* clones, they're *Arkanoid* clones. ✱



» *Arkanoid: Eternal Battle* is the latest game in the series and focusses on multiplayer-based gameplay.



» [Wii] *Arkanoid Plus* was one of three Taito *Plus* games for WiiWare alongside *Bubble Bobble Plus* and *Puzzle Bobble Plus*.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

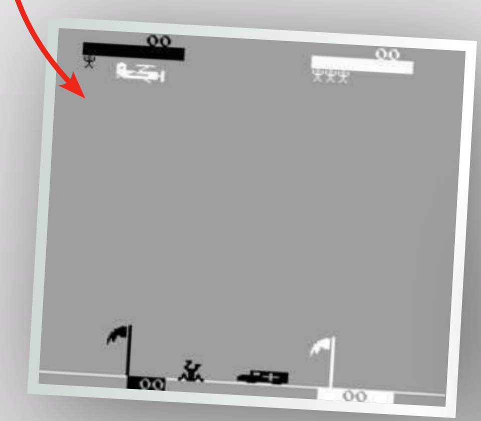
VIDEOGAME DEATHS

If videogames have taught us anything, it's that death can strike at any time, in the most unexpected manner. Here are our favourite stupid deaths – not the sad and epic type (sorry Aeris) but the bizarre and brutal…

PARACHUTE MALFUNCTION

SKY DIVER

■ Faceplanting the ground after leaping from a plane is a messy way to go, yet this black-and-white release from Atari tries to distract from the horror by having you kick your legs comically in the air like a silent movie stunt. They even send in an ambulance but they're fooling no one – your upper body is gone and those are death twitches.



DROWNED BY A REBELLIOUS REPTILE

TURTLE BRIDGE

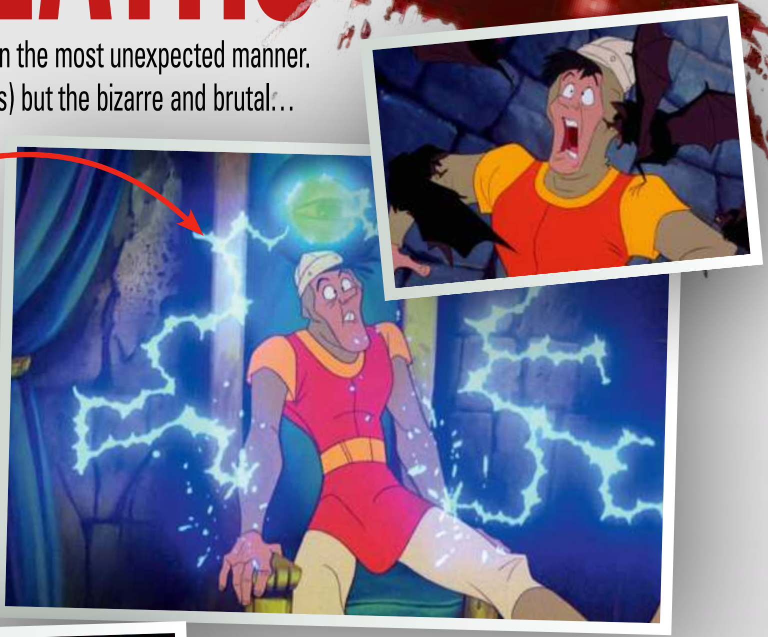
■ There are many ways you can kill others in Nintendo's Game & Watch series, from carelessly leaving a manhole uncovered to poor manoeuvring of a safety net, yet here we fall victim to a disgruntled sea turtle. Sick of being trodden on by thoughtless, shadowy humans, the far from gentle giant takes a dive and grins as our lungs fill with water. *Finding Nemo* lied to us.

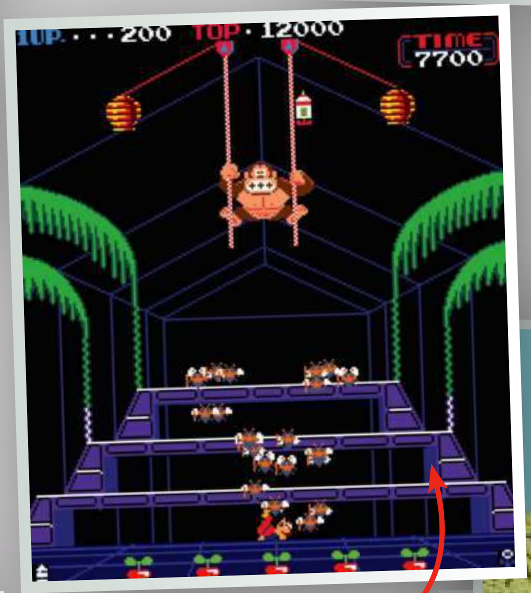
GAME & WATCH
Nintendo
TURTLE BRIDGE
WIDE SCREEN
LEFT
RIGHT

SHE AIN'T WORTH IT…

DRAGON'S LAIR

■ This seminal LaserDisc game is arguably just one long death scene. Every few seconds, poor Dirk is cast down a bottomless pit, eaten by bats, squeezed senseless by serpents or, our favourite, electrocuted sitting on the throne. Yet gamers would keep pumping in the coins to watch further cruel killings. Pure Eighties nihilism.





STUNG TO DEATH

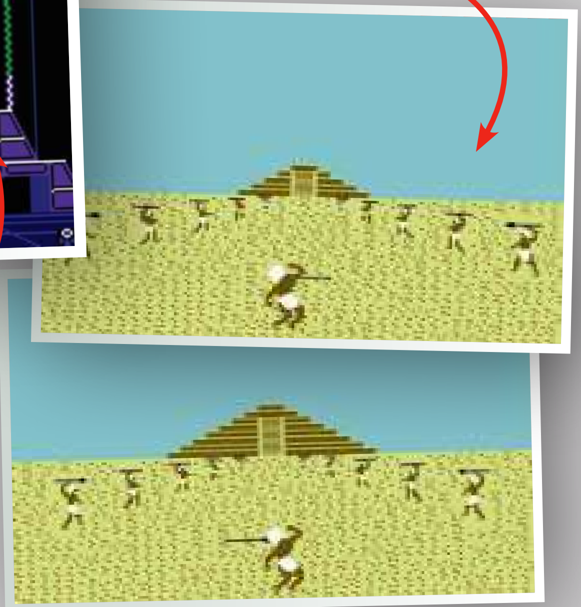
DONKEY KONG 3

■ We had gotten used to being crushed by barrels and giant springs in the first game but we find this death particularly disturbing. Donkey Kong knocks us to the floor with a well-aimed basketball and then a swarm of angry insects finishes the job in a frenzy of bites and stings. Were those pot plants really worth such a sacrifice?

SPEAR THROUGH EAR

AZTEC CHALLENGE

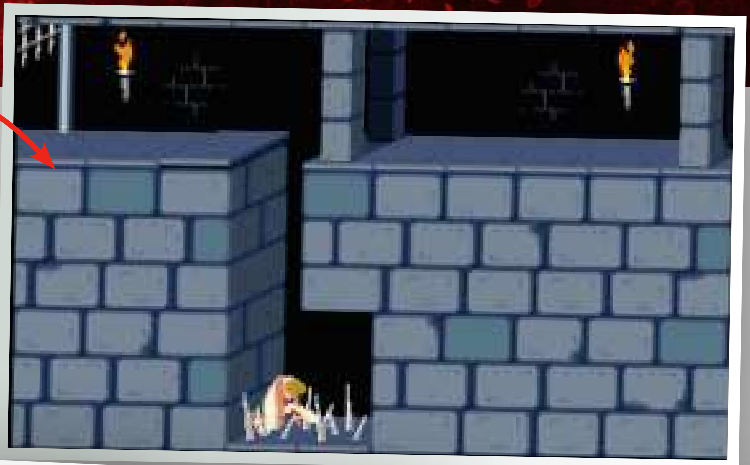
■ Flattened by a giant frog, disembowelled by skeletons… coder Paul Norman had already inflicted some gruesome deaths on C64 gamers in his debut, *Forbidden Forest*, but the opening level of his second game is sickening in its brutality. Wearing nothing but a loin cloth, you are speared repeatedly in the head by impassive executioners. Naked hatred.



SPIKED OUT

PRINCE OF PERSIA

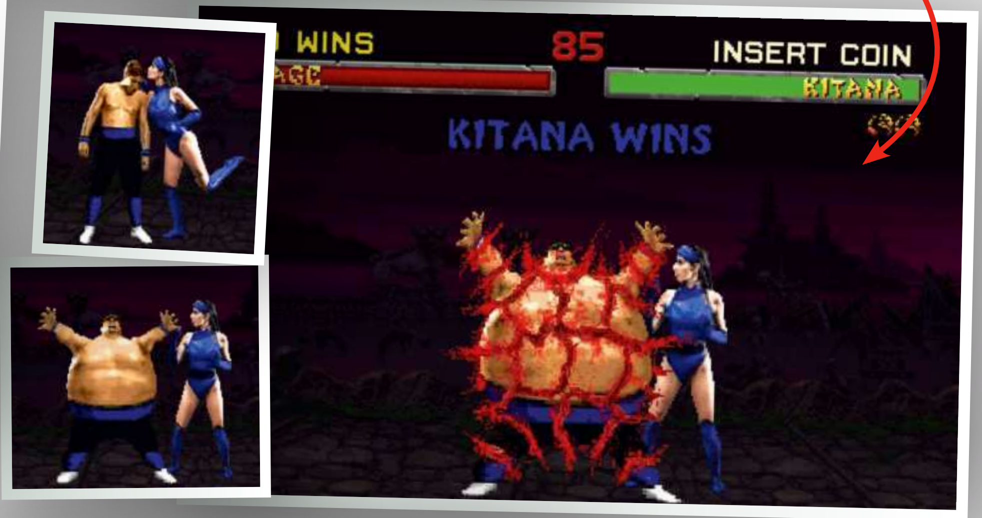
■ From *Sonic The Hedgehog* to *Spelunky*, falling into a pit of spikes has long been a staple way to snuff it in countless platform games but there's something about how our poor hero gets skewered that has long troubled us. He's slumped yet still sitting in an upright position, which leaves us in no doubt as to the entry point of one long spike. Ouch!

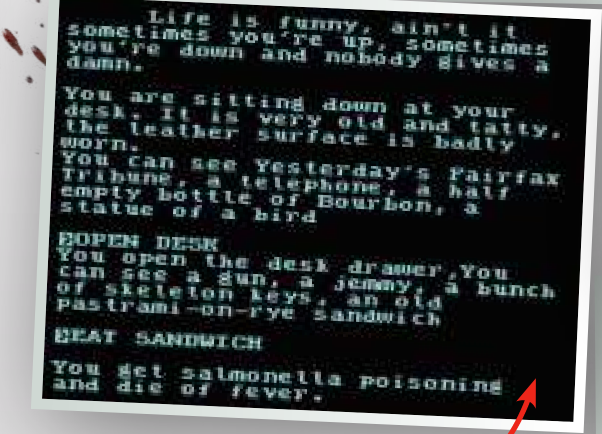


KISS ME DEADLY

MORTAL KOMBAT II

■ You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss… unless you're on a Tinder date with Kitana. She's stunned you with her striking beauty and then leans in for a peck on the lips, flicking up her heels coquettishly. Filled with love, you expand to twice your size and explode in a gory display of your inner organs. Swipe left, people.





```
      Life is funny, ain't it
sometimes you're up, sometimes
you're down and nobody gives a
damn.

You are sitting down at your
desk. It is very old and tatty.
the leather surface is badly
worn.
You can see Yesterday's Fairfax
Tribune, a telephone, a half
empty bottle of Bourbon, a
statue of a bird

BOPEN DESK
You open the desk drawer.You
can see a gun, a jemmy, a bunch
of skeleton keys, an old
pastrami-on-rye sandwich

BEAT SANDWICH

You get salmonella poisoning
and die of fever.
```

KILLER SANDWICH

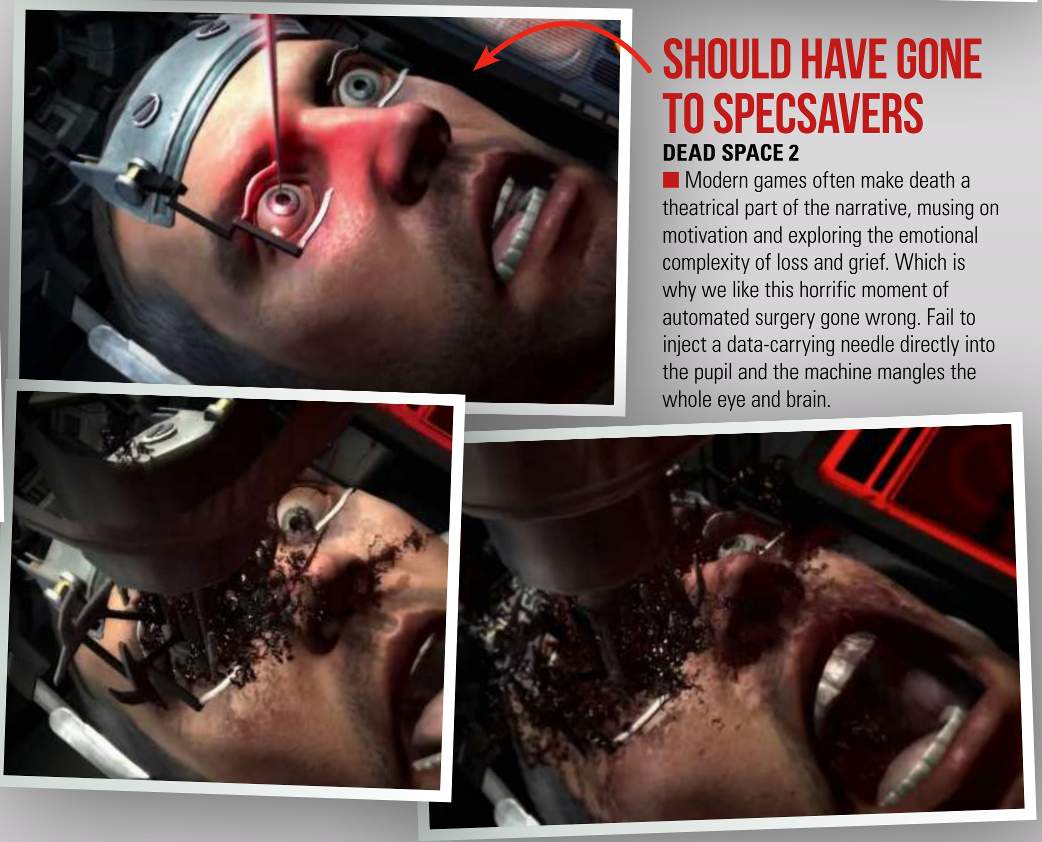
PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

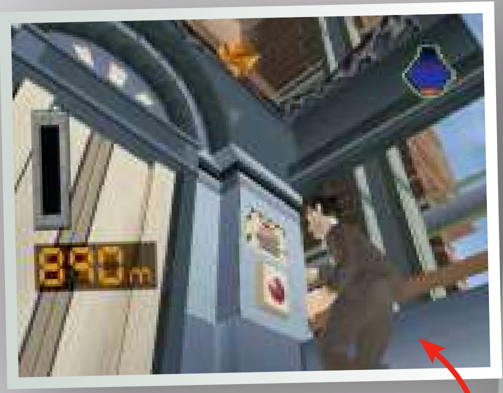
■ As a genre, text adventures were pioneers of the arbitrary death and revelled in killing any unsuspecting player who typed in an apparently innocuous verb and noun. Here is a classic example from Mastertronic's 1986 release. You fancy a nibble before you take on a case and you're dead in two moves. Merciless.

SHOULD HAVE GONE TO SPECSAVERS

DEAD SPACE 2

■ Modern games often make death a theatrical part of the narrative, musing on motivation and exploring the emotional complexity of loss and grief. Which is why we like this horrific moment of automated surgery gone wrong. Fail to inject a data-carrying needle directly into the pupil and the machine mangles the whole eye and brain.





ELEVATOR INACTION

INCREDIBLE CRISIS

■ Terror is often intensified by the mundanity of one's surroundings. Take the hapless salaryman in this bizarre PlayStation title. During a casual walk down his office corridor, he is almost flattened by a giant rolling globe. He finds safety in the lift, only for it to plunge down the shaft, his desperate hammering of the emergency button only adding to the pathos.

THE MAKING OF

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II

TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAMES RARELY GRAB THE HEADLINES IN THE HISTORY OF GAMING. BUT FOR JON VAN CANEGHEM AND MARK CALDWELL, A LOVE OF CHESS AND BOARD GAMES LED TO ONE OF THE GENRE'S BEST TITLES, THE ACCLAIMED HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II

WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON

IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: 3DO

» DEVELOPER: NEW WORLD COMPUTING

» RELEASED: 1996

» PLATFORM: DOS, WINDOWS, MAC, GBC

» GENRE: STRATEGY

***Heroes Of Might And Magic II* stands proud as one of the key PC games of the Nineties strategy boom.** It has its roots in a less well-known game, *King's Bounty*, released six years earlier by New World Computing. "*Heroes* was born from *King's Bounty* and *King's Bounty* was born from wanting to make a *Star Trek* game," Mark Caldwell explains, "at the time, Gulf And Western owned *Star Trek* and was already making *Star Trek* books, games and trinkets, so they wouldn't give us a licence. But we knew Task Force Games had made a *Star Fleet Battles* board game based on *Star Trek*. We thought we could licence that, and while they were interested, it turned out to be cheaper to buy the entire company."

After Mark and Jon Van Caneghem bought Task Force Games, both a board game and videogame of *King's Bounty* was released. Jon remembers that, "*King's Bounty* was my first attempt to make a strategy game and we got a lot of praise for it. When making games in those days, we had no idea if we'd make enough money to be able to make the next game. So after the success, it was obvious we were gonna make another one. And we took the fan feedback on everything they were asking for, which I think is very important in game development, especially making sequels."

That sequel was titled *Heroes Of Might And Magic* and after winning numerous awards it was inevitable a follow-up would be made. "We weren't making a sequel for the first time," explains Mark. "So we did as we always did. Take ideas we couldn't use, or didn't have time to implement, in previous games and work them into the next one. Designing a computer game, at least at NWC, was always about iterating. Just start, get something working, then get feedback, and iterate."

» Jon Van Caneghem cofounded NWC in 1984 to make games he wanted to play himself.

After the initial design process, Jon started work on *Heroes II*'s map editor. "I spent a lot of effort creating the editor so players could make their own scenarios. That was a must-have and what everyone was asking for. I had a very clunky tool during the development of the first *Heroes*, so I wanted to build *Heroes II* with the same editor that we were releasing to the fans. I worked on the editor first and actually used it for many of the maps and played the scenarios over and over to balance them. It was really a passion project with the amount of time I kept putting in adjusting all the maps and making new ones."

In July 1996, Jon sold NWC to 3DO and this gave him more time to work on *Heroes II* instead of running a company. "I had sold the company to 3DO and that was a positive thing for me from a time perspective. I could focus on development since we were now part of a larger company that handled everything from payroll, the HR and offices. And I think I did

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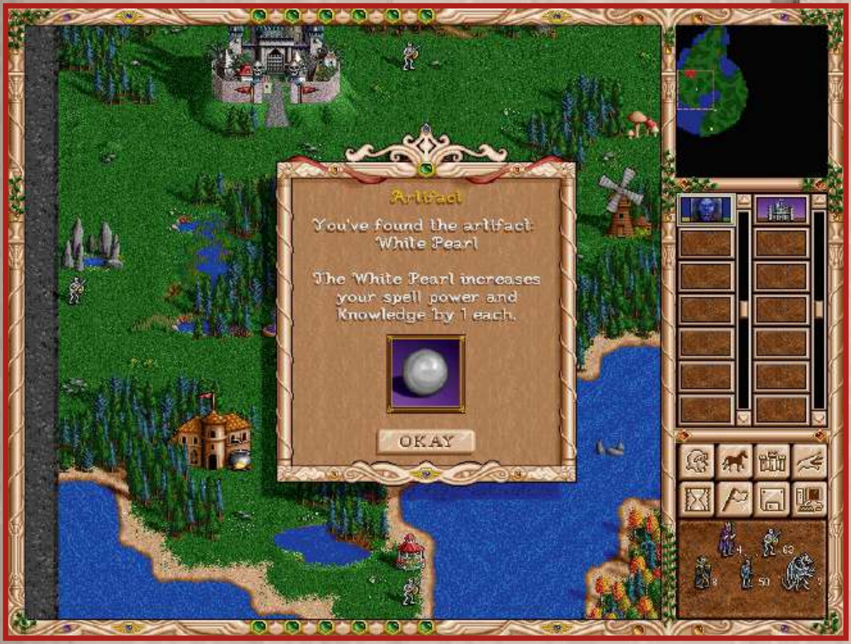


Artifact

You've found the artifact White Pearl

The White Pearl increases your spell power and Knowledge by 1 each.

» [PC] You won't get very far without the help of some powerful artifacts.

Might and Magic

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MIGHT AND MAGIC IV: CLOUDS OF XEEN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: DOS, FM TOWNS, NEC-PC
YEAR: 1999

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III
SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC, LINUX
YEAR: 1999

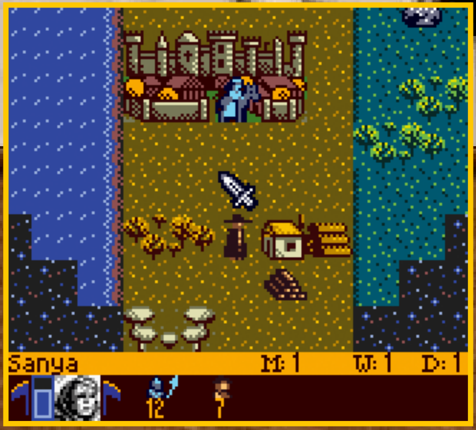
MIGHT AND MAGIC IX
SYSTEM: WINDOWS
YEAR: 1999

» Mark Caldwell was cofounder and vice president at New World Computing taking charge of technology development.

some of my best work in that period. It really let me put those hours into designing all of the maps, testing all the different difficulty settings and making different challenges."

Heroes II retained the original game's art design but added higher resolution, greater colour depth and smoother animations that improved all areas of the graphics. "Art helps a game, but sometimes it also hurts it," Mark explains. "Our users expected iteration, not revolution, as far as art style goes. We would oversee the process, but the style and quality came from the art director and artists, and since they remained from our previous games, so did the quality and style."

Jon explains the decision to stick with the art style as, "Two parts, one was for speed of getting a game done. Going with the 2D art was faster as we already had the engine. And secondly, we already knew we had a fan base with *Heroes*, so we wanted to live up to it." Interestingly, Jon remembers a discussion that almost led to *Heroes II* going 3D. "We actually did some experimenting with 3D characters using a 3D engine. At the time, there were software renders for 3D and not hardware, you had to have a high-end machine and there was a huge trade-off between the detail of the polygons versus the speed of the rendering. In an experiment we did, the creatures didn't look very good due to low polygon counts. ▶

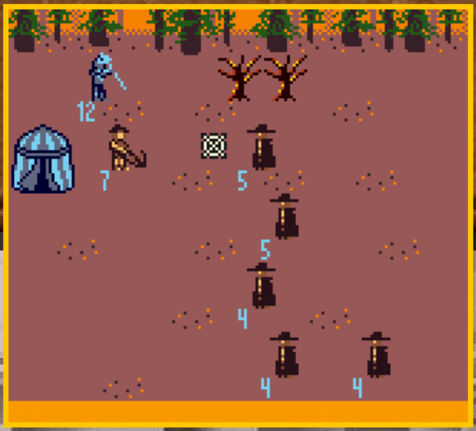


POCKET MONSTERS

GRAND BATTLE STRATEGIES ON THE SMALL SCREEN

■ You would think that developing a grand strategy game on the humble Game Boy Color would be difficult, but the 2000 port is decent and keeps most of the gameplay intact. Oddly, it uses creatures, factions and other features from *Heroes III*, so isn't really *Heroes II* at all. To make matters worse, the first Game Boy Color title, simply titled *Heroes*, has more in common with *Heroes II*. The confusion with names aside, this mini version is surprisingly good and has everything from the battles, resource management, construction and exploration that is synonymous with the series as a whole.

The obvious difference is the presentation, the Game Boy Color struggles to recreate the beautiful artwork and expansive design of the PC original. That's not to say it looks terrible, just basic and not well defined in places. The other big difference is the lack of a mouse and you have to constantly keep tapping the d-pad to move your cursor around the maps. The risk was that it would all be too much for a Game Boy to handle but both *Heroes* games do a great job in recreating the PC experience.



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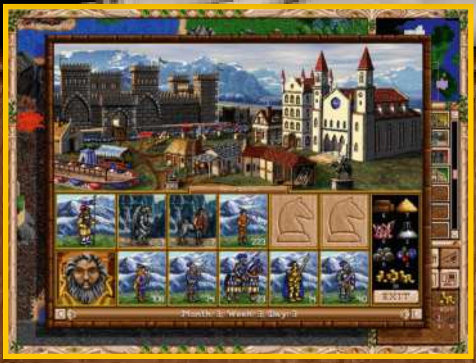
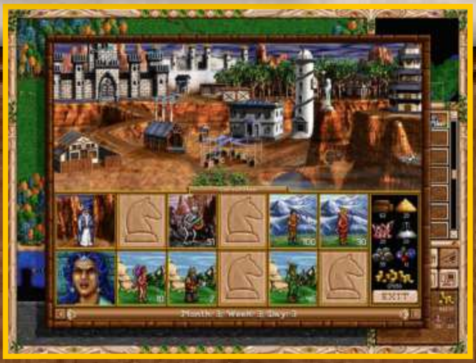
FANTASY FACTIONS

NOT ALL HEROES WEAR CAPES



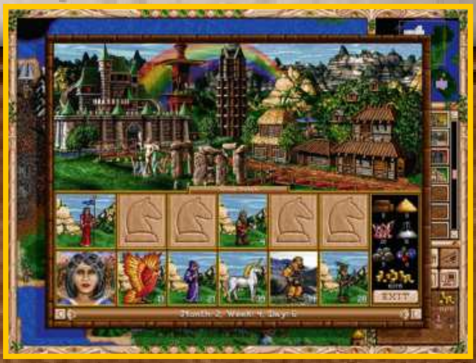
KNIGHT

■ It wouldn't be a fantasy game without some chivalrous Knights to command. Although strong in attack and defence, the Knight lacks magic prowess or flying creatures to recruit. This typically noble faction relies on large army stacks and speed on the battlefield.



WIZARD

■ The Wizard faction is home to arguably the best unit in the game, the mighty titan. There is a good mix of ranged, flying and tank troops to recruit and extra spells to learn at the library. However, creature recruitment and Hero development are slow.



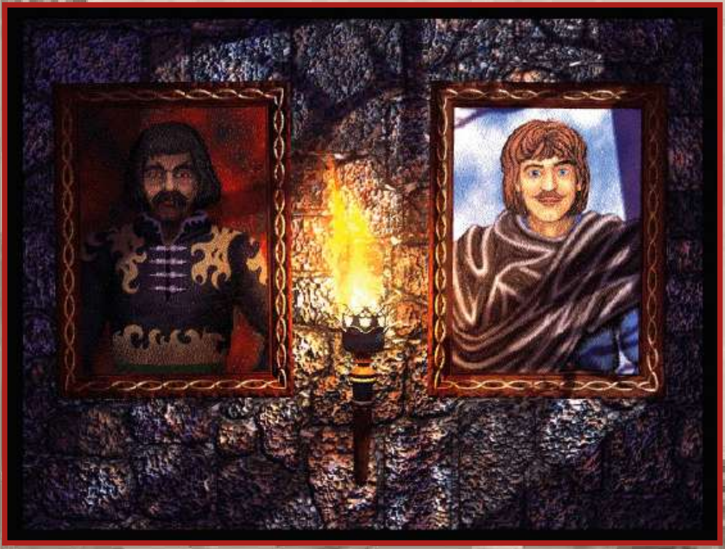
SORCERESS

■ The Sorceress has a great blend of magic and combat. The elf and druid units allow covering fire while the sprites and phoenixes swoop in to attack. Hero development is balanced between spells and defence while the creature costs won't break the realm's coffers.

▶ "You also have to think about your staff. My staff was full of 2D artists, and 3D was just coming along. So we didn't have much experience building 3D assets. I felt we could get a much higher fidelity using bitmap art than we could with the state of 3D engines at the time. And I just viewed the town screens as an inspirational point, like, 'Wow, look at my beautiful town in all its glory.' If we had gone 3D it wouldn't have looked anything like what it did. Because we were just using straight bitmaps it had that hand-drawn look and I have to give credit to the fantastic artists we had at the time."

One of the fondest memories fans of *Heroes II* have is its soundtrack. The music was undertaken by Rob King and Paul Romero who composed a full orchestral score that included opera singers. Mark remembers the discussion on deciding to include classical opera. "Rob King was our sound master, it was his friendship with Paul Romero that suggested to me that we use classical music. Since I was trained in classical music, I was excited about the departure from the usual game music and gave it a green light. I'd no idea how much impact it would have, but it was a perfect match."

» [PC] Who will you rally to? The virtuous King Roland or his evil brother Archibald.



> "HEROES WAS ORIGINALLY A PURE STRATEGY GAME THAT WAS MEANT TO PLAY AND FEEL LIKE CHESS. THE IDEA OF BRINGING RPG ELEMENTS INTO IT WAS NEVER A PLAN IN THE FIRST HEROES AND IT ALL HAPPENED IN HEROES II"
>
> JON VAN CANEGHEM

Jon agrees and remembers that, "There was a lot of fun and vibrant discussions around the opera stuff. My internal audio producer Rob King was Paul's partner and we just told them to go for it. And so, they came back and showed everyone in the studio and we had such debates about the opera. We even had to make two tracks in the UI by adding an option to turn off the opera for the player. But it was fantastic pieces of music and today is just as loved as the actual games themselves."

Heroes II's gameplay mimics the first game but features were built upon to improve the overall experience. Two new factions, the Wizard and Necromancer, added gameplay depth and the castles now had buildings that strengthen the player's position during siege attacks. However, these additions caused problems with the game's balance and Jon explains that, "We had a good formula with the first four factions and it was natural to add a couple of town types but we needed a lot of tweaking on the basic gameplay. My test department and I used to joke when I'd walk in

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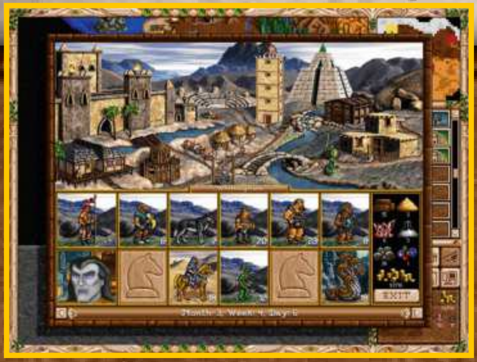
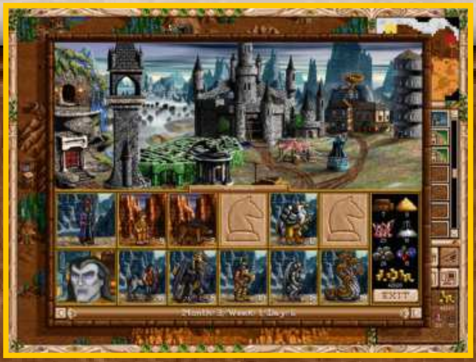


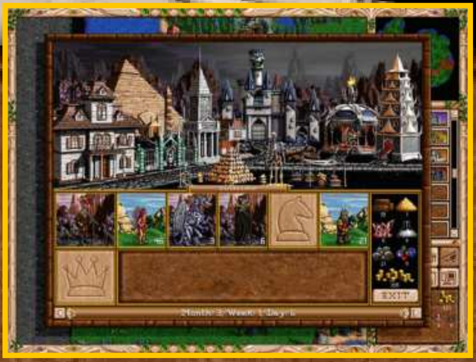
BARBARIAN

The Barbarian is a straightforward offensive faction that relies on large stacks to swarm the battlefield. The creatures are cheap to recruit but lack the defensive capabilities and speed of the Knight which leads to the Barbarian struggling in the later stages of a campaign.



WARLOCK

Home to the black dragons that could also be considered the game's best creature, the Warlock uses a vast array of flying creatures to overwhelm enemy archers for quick victories. What the Warlock lacks in attack and defence is made up for with extremely powerful magic.



NECROMANCER

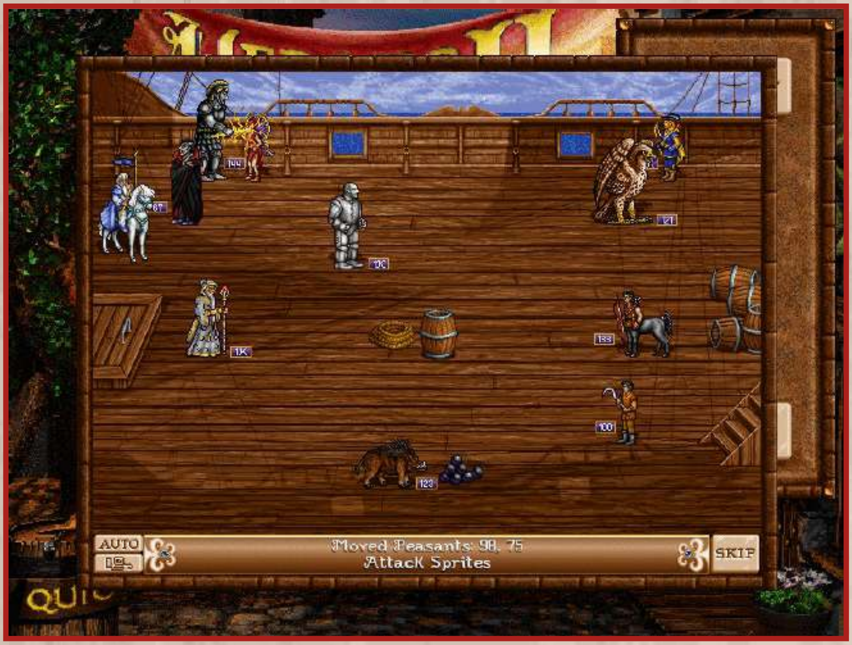
The Necromancer raises the dead and adds them as skeletons to the undead horde. While most of the creatures are weak, they have magic-resistant abilities that make them harder to kill. The faction's blend of magic and attack means it requires some advanced tactics to master.

there and they're all playing the same strategy. I knew I had to fix the balance and the moment I came back into the test group they were then arguing about which strategy would win."

It was this constant balancing, which was so important to the team, that led to the biggest improvement in *Heroes II*. The Hero characters could now acquire secondary skills that were varied and ranged from increasing movement to determining the Hero's spell powers. Choosing between these abilities added a new role-playing feature as players considered which skills would serve them better. It was at this moment the core gameplay of *Heroes* began to evolve.

"Something we discovered in *Heroes II*," Jon explains, "was a turning point for the whole series. *Heroes* was originally a pure strategy game that was meant to play and feel like chess. The idea of bringing RPG elements into it was never a plan in the first *Heroes* and it all happened in *Heroes II*. We ended up expanding the audience because we added a way to play it like an RPG instead of a pure strategy game. And that was fascinating to me, so we really ran with that."

The magic system was also overhauled and the Heroes now had spell points that deplete as each spell is cast. This allowed players to be flexible in their approach to battle strategy and Jon explains that this wasn't planned but grew during development. "It was a system that we ▶



Moved Peasants: 98, 75
Attack Sprites

» [PC] Take your army to the seven seas for swashbuckling action.

» [PC] Between campaign maps, you're treated to some lovely cutscenes.

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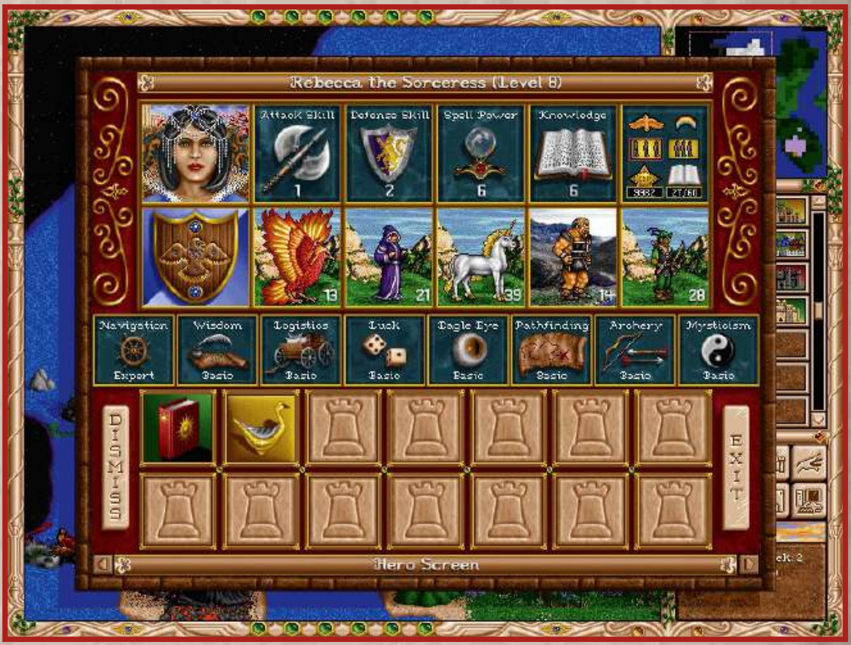
“THE ONLINE WAS A VERY TOUGH CALL. WE LIKED THE IDEA OF LOCAL MULTIPLAYER BECAUSE WE HAD SEEN IT IN EARLIER GAMES. AND THAT PROVED TO BE PRETTY FUN, BUT AS THE INTERNET STARTED TO GROW, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT WE NEEDED TO HAVE IT ONLINE”
JON VAN CANEGHEM

» [PC] The Hero screen shows all your abilities, artifacts and creatures.

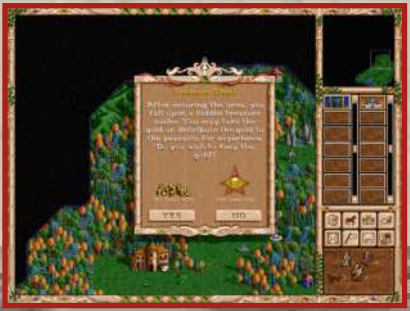
just figured out as we went along, it was about making more gameplay and that’s something I’ve always enjoyed putting in my games.”

It wasn’t just the magic, Heroes or castles that were changed. The maps had many new additions and this meant Jon had to contend with further balancing issues. “We had to change how often some things showed up, and this is why the maps are so important in *Heroes* games,” he explains. “You know how much stuff is on the map, how far away it is from other stuff and so on. That created more balance than the actual bag of tricks the players had to use. And figuring that out was more important than the actual individual items being balanced against each other. We found that if you make the map fair, the balancing takes care of itself.”

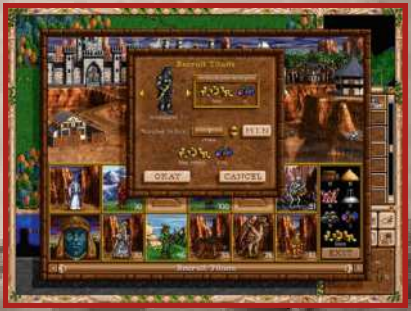
Heroes II’s story centres on Lord Ironfist’s two sons, the good King Roland and his would-be usurper and brother, the bad Lord Archibald. It plays out across two campaigns with each following one brother as they battle for the throne. Mark remembers some of the story’s inspirations. “There is always an inspiration to be gained from everywhere, some came from


Rebecca the Sorceress (Level 8)
Attack Skill
Defense Skill
Spell Power
Knowledge
1
2
6
6
13
21
39
14
28
Navigation
Expert
Wisdom
Basic
Logistics
Basic
Luck
Basic
Eagle Eye
Basic
Pathfinding
Basic
Archery
Basic
Mysticism
Basic
DISMISS
EXIT
Hero Screen

» [PC] Take the gold for yourself or share it with the local populace for the experience.



» [PC] You will need expert resource management to afford the powerful titans.

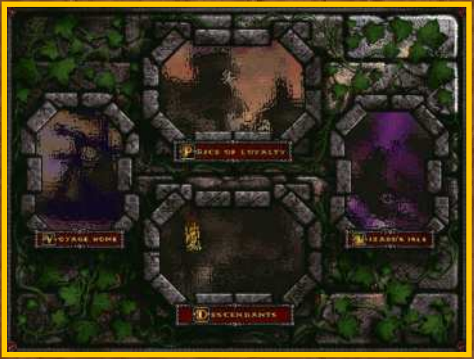

OKAY
CANCEL

PRICE OF LOYALTY

ALL GREAT PC GAMES GET AN EXPANSION

■ In May 1997, *The Price Of Loyalty* expansion was released with Cyberlore Studios undertaking development. It added four new campaign stories unconnected to the main quest, additional scenario maps as well as new artifacts and creatures. The expansion also added balancing features with the most notable being a new building in the Necromancer’s castle. The Shrine would amplify any Necromancer’s resurrection skill and turn it into a much more powerful faction. The number of skeletons created after each battle increased significantly and was an effective way to build an unstoppable army.

Moving the work out of NWC’s offices to another studio allowed the team to start work on *Heroes III* and Jon explains that, “Cyberlore were a very talented group who also loved *Heroes*. I don’t remember the details but we only had limited resources to start working on *Heroes III*. It was a way for us to expand our development capability by hiring Cyberlore to build the expansion. Those guys did a fantastic job and expanded on the RPG elements. They added all this depth and it just made a much bigger game for more players to enjoy and the net result is it grew the audience.”


PRICE OF LOYALTY
VOYAGE HOME
WIZARD'S ISLE
DESCENDANTS

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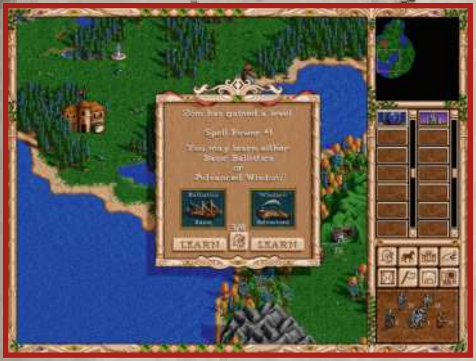


Zim has gained a level.

Spell Power +1

You may learn either
Basic Ballistics
or
Advanced Wisdom.

» [PC] Maps are usually won by utilising magic spells that change outcomes in numerous ways.

popular TV shows like *Star Trek* since we're big Trekkers, movies like *Princess Bride*, books, and various other ideas. *Heroes* was always an internal collaboration and everyone had a voice."

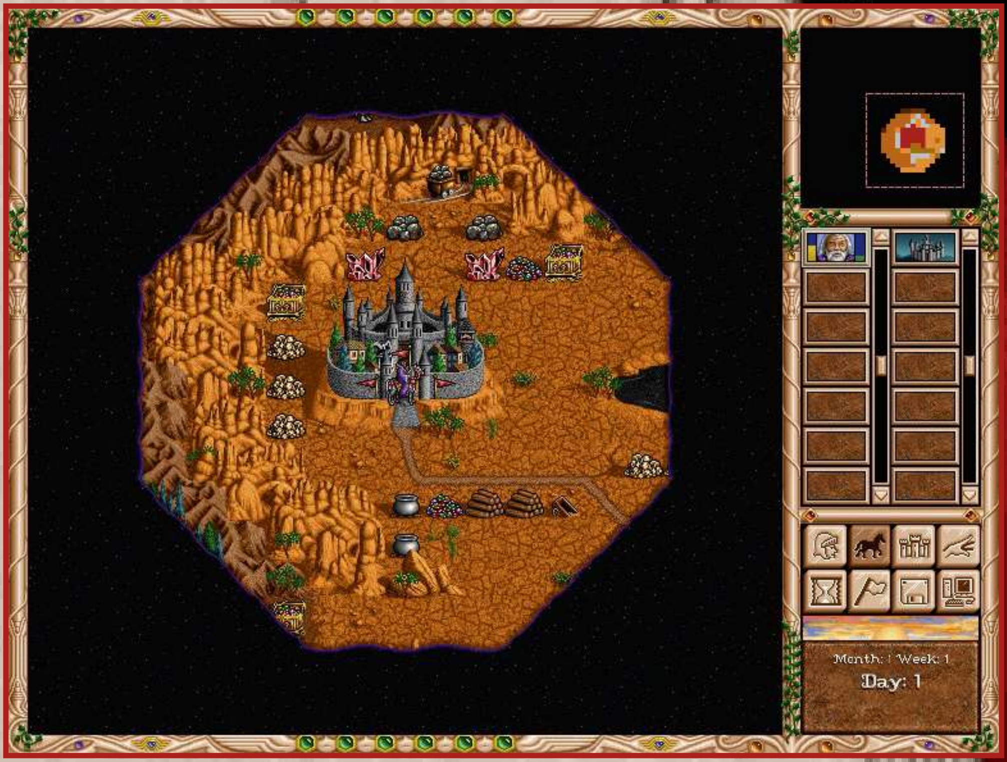
Jon feels the story is something added after you made a great game. "The stories in my games are more background to me than the foreground, I tend to make a game and then add story. With the *Heroes* story, I had help from the team and we'd sit around talking about what makes sense for these characters. A lot of it came from stories from the *Might And Magic* RPG series but we tried to expand it so *Heroes* still had its own world, it had to stand on its own, regardless of any outside forces."

Heroes II had online and local multiplayer options and Jon explains that he was hesitant about including this. "The online was a very tough call," he admits. "We liked the idea of local multiplayer because we had seen it in earlier games. And that proved to be pretty fun, but as the internet started to grow, it was obvious that we needed to have it online. In fact, it was so problematic, that after *Heroes II*, going into *III*, there were debates around giving up turn-based and going to a real-time game because of online multiplayer."

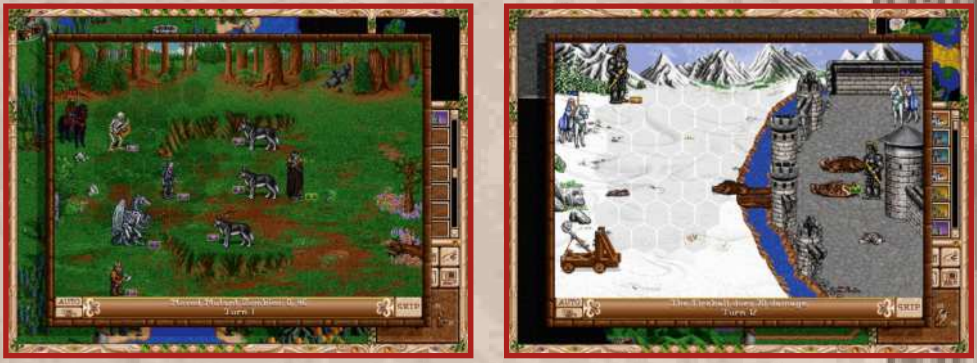
Many fans will be relieved this didn't happen but according to Jon it nearly became a reality. "There was actually a point where we were on the edge of taking *Heroes* real-time instead of keeping it where it was, and it was because that's where the gaming world was going with *WarCraft* and *Command & Conquer*. I worried that it would be detrimental and had to make the call and I said, 'Let's keep *Heroes* forever turn-based.'"

The pair is proud of what they achieved and have fond memories of the accolades *Heroes II* received. There is also a loyal fanbase that continuously makes new maps and modifications for others to enjoy. Mark says, "It felt great, but *Might And Magic* also won awards and we had several bookshelves with awards, some from official places, some from fans, some from distributors." And on *Heroes II*'s longevity Mark feels that, "When you have a good game, time is no threat. We spent time to make it great, and time is letting us know it was time well spent."

And Jon echoes Mark's sentiments. "When I hear someone tell me how it affected them it's a wonderful feeling. I love to share that praise back with the team because I couldn't have done it without them. It actually feels better as time goes by in terms of how many people it's influenced. So many other game developers too, I think that's the most flattering part. It's influenced so many people for so long and people are still playing many years later. Anytime I have a bad day I just go think about that." *



» [PC] Each map starts with a fog of war that must be uncovered through exploration.



» [PC] After an epic battle, just two titan stacks are left to decide the victor.

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Neo Geo AES

» **MANUFACTURER:** SNK » **YEAR:** 1990
» **COST:** £299.99 (launch), £450+ (today, boxed), £250+ (today, unboxed)

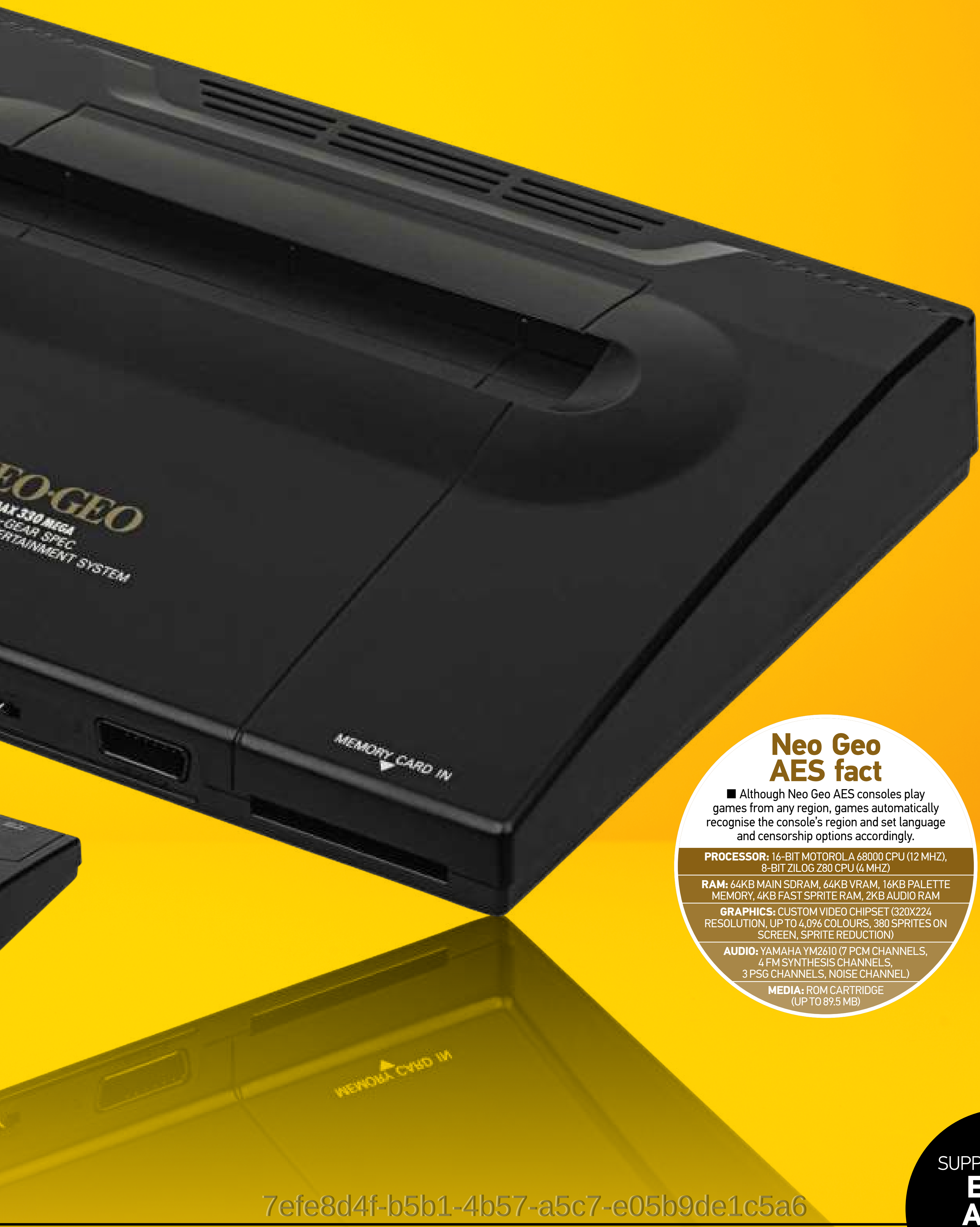
For many of you, the Neo Geo AES hardly needs an introduction. SNK's first home console was just its state-of-the-art Neo Geo MVS arcade hardware in a console casing, making it vastly more powerful than other systems of the time and ensuring that you really did get the authentic experience. It was vastly more expensive than other machines as a result, and the cartridges – huge in both physical size and ROM capacity – started at £99.99, ensuring that it was known by many and owned by few.

Fittingly, the machine looks like a high-end piece of kit, with gold lettering on its sleek black casing. The hardware doesn't have too many bells and whistles, the main points of interest being the headphone jack and volume slider on the front, and a slot for memory cards that could be used both at home and at the arcade. The Neo Geo AES actually survived SNK's bankruptcy in 2001, thanks to a small but dedicated audience and the long life of the arcade hardware, with *Samurai Shodown V Special* taking the honours as the system's final game in 2004. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME

Samurai Shodown II

The Neo Geo is best known for its fighting games, and *Samurai Shodown II* is one of the very best of those, with superbly tense high-damage sword fights elevated by beautiful sprites and backgrounds, full-screen scaling and atmospheric audio. Fortunately, the Japanese versions of SNK's hits from the mid-Nineties fighting boom also tend to be the most common games on the system, meaning that *Samurai Shodown II* is a relatively affordable game by Neo Geo standards. Between the price and the quality, it would make a great start to your collection.



Neo Geo AES fact

■ Although Neo Geo AES consoles play games from any region, games automatically recognise the console's region and set language and censorship options accordingly.

PROCESSOR: 16-BIT MOTOROLA 68000 CPU (12 MHZ), 8-BIT ZILOG Z80 CPU (4 MHZ)

RAM: 64KB MAIN SDRAM, 64KB VRAM, 16KB PALETTE MEMORY, 4KB FAST SPRITE RAM, 2KB AUDIO RAM

GRAPHICS: CUSTOM VIDEO CHIPSET (320X224 RESOLUTION, UP TO 4,096 COLOURS, 380 SPRITES ON SCREEN, SPRITE REDUCTION)

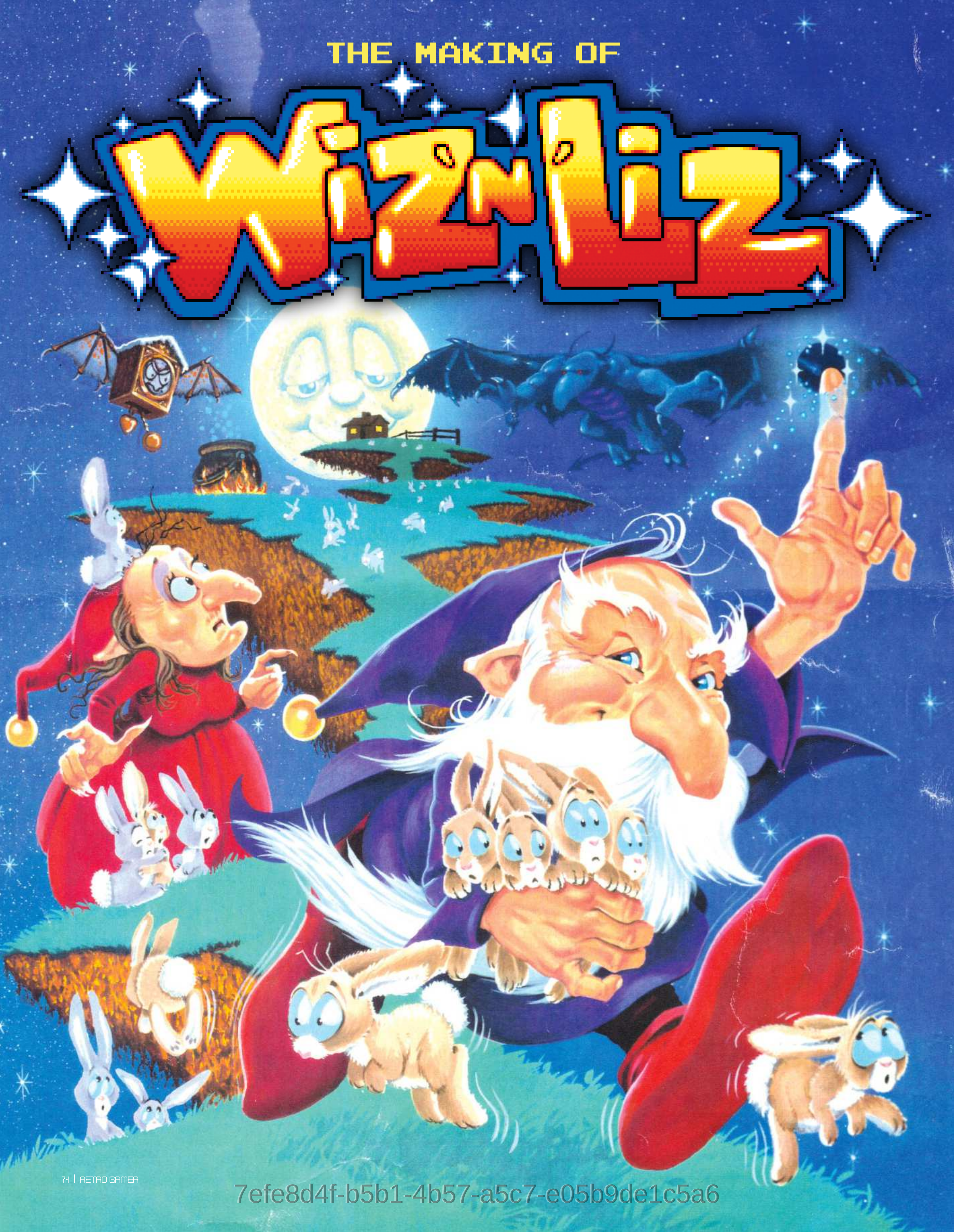
AUDIO: YAMAHA YM2610 (7 PCM CHANNELS, 4 FM SYNTHESIS CHANNELS, 3 PSG CHANNELS, NOISE CHANNEL)

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 89.5 MB)

SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE MAKING OF

WIZ'N'LIZ



THE SEGA MEGA DRIVE HAD ITS FAIR SHARE OF PLATFORMERS, BUT THERE WERE NONE QUITE LIKE WIZ 'N' LIZ. DEVELOPED BY RAISING HELL SOFTWARE (SOON TO BECOME BIZARRE CREATIONS) AND PUBLISHED BY LIVERPOOL'S PSYGNOSIS, THIS IS THE MANIC AND RATHER EXCITING STORY OF TWO WABBIT-OBSESSED MAGICIANS…

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS

» **DEVELOPER:** RAISING HELL SOFTWARE

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, AMIGA

» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

» *Wiz 'N' Liz*'s lead designer and coder, Martyn Chudley.

"I grew up down in Newton Abbey, Devon, in the late-Seventies and early Eighties, the years when home computing was really starting, so I've always been very interested in computers," says Martyn Chudley, founder of Raising Hell Software. Having scraped together funds via a paper round, Martyn cut his programming teeth on a hard-earned Commodore 64 computer. After meeting fellow student Dominic Frazer, the two eschewed university and began a company called Powerslave Developments, creating the C64 game *Combat Crazy* for Silverbird, the budget arm of publisher Telecomsoft. It wasn't a success, yet despite this failure, Dominic and Martyn persevered and decided to make the leap into the 16-bit market, purchasing an Amiga 500 and Atari 520ST. "We made a couple of demos, and mine was called *Robodragon*," recalls Martyn, "and we sent them off to a few companies, including Psygnosis."

Despite numerous rejections, the Liverpool publisher requested a meeting. "However, completely coincidentally, the day Psygnosis called us was the very day that Dominic told me he was giving up Powerslave and getting a 'real' job so he could make ends meet for his family," remembers Martyn. As a result, *Robodragon* and its creator made the long trip from Devon to Liverpool alone and once there he met the founders of Psygnosis, including John White and the late Ian Hetherington. "Basically they liked my demo and decided that they'd like to take it on for me to develop as a full game. Psygnosis! Wanted me!" laughs Martyn. "Although I didn't find out until a few years later that one of the reasons they liked me was because I was cheap and just fitted into the end of their development budget…"

Martyn spent the next year working out of his parents' house, slowly turning *Robodragon* into *The Killing Game Show* for the Amiga. With the process proving too lengthy, he moved temporarily to ▶

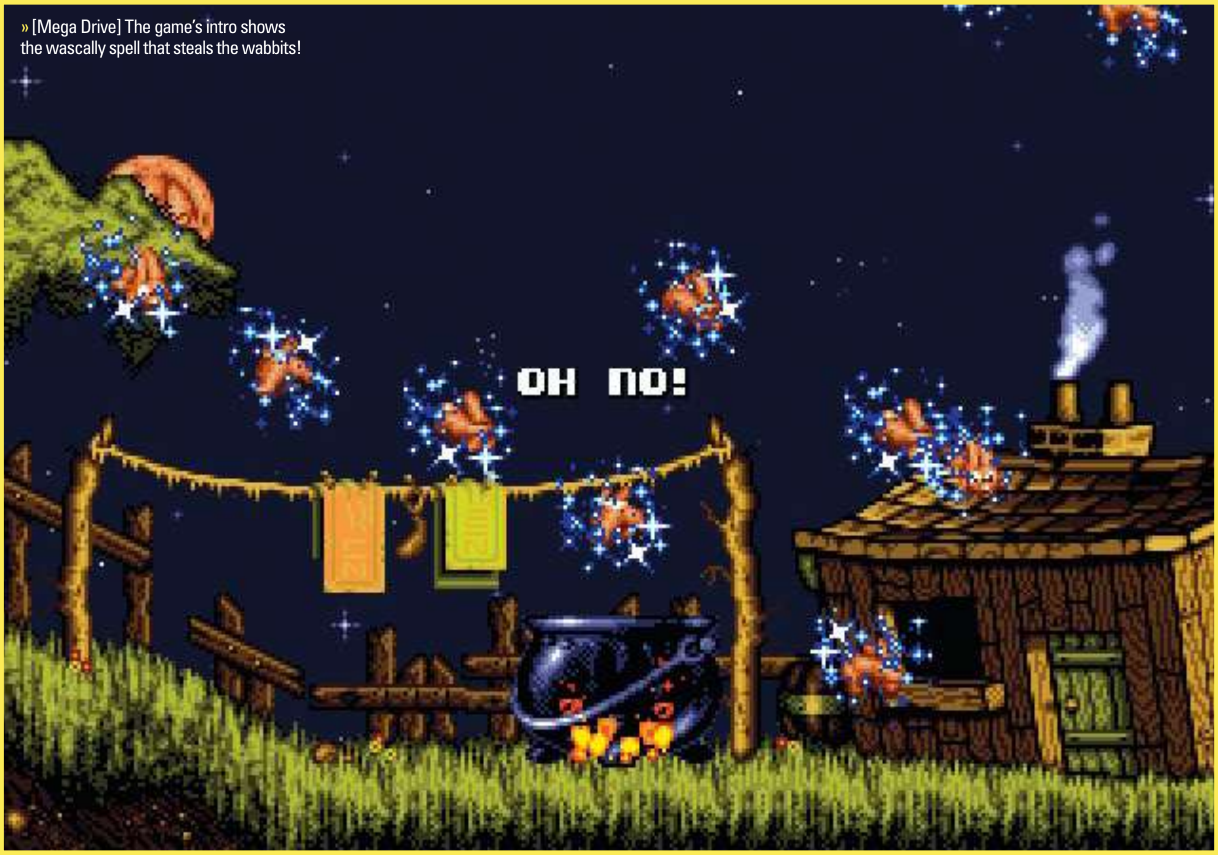
"THE ART WAS COMPLETELY DRIVEN BY MIKE AND HE JUST KEPT CREATING COOL STUFF WITH A GREAT STYLE"
MARTYN CHUDLEY

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

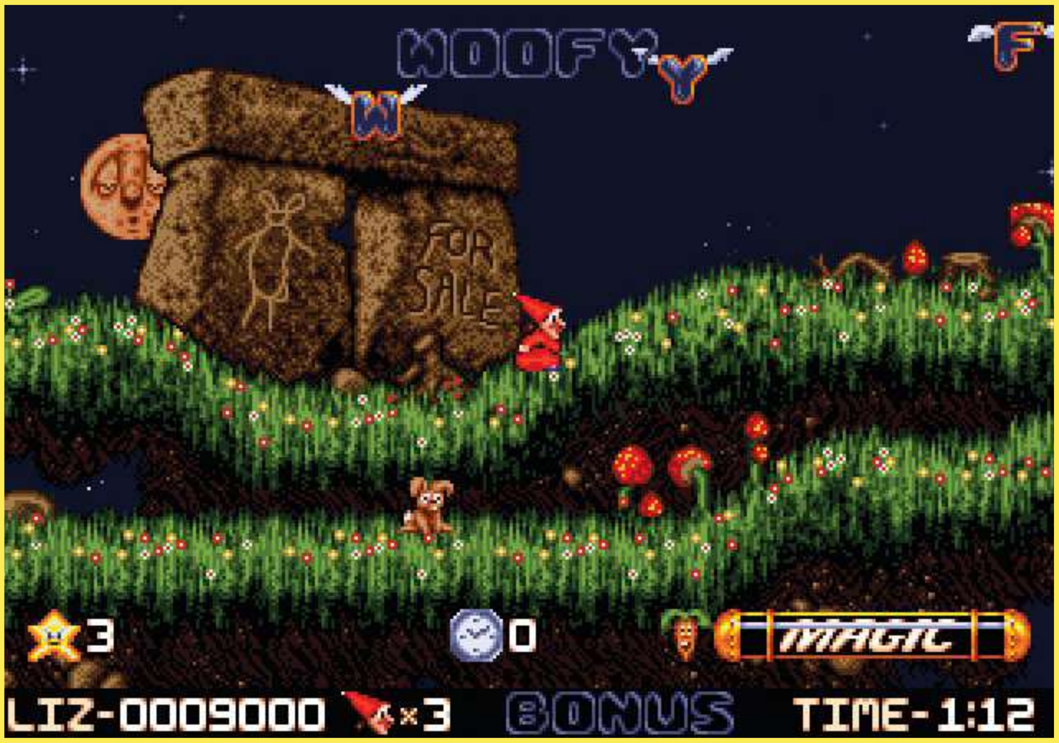
FORMULA 1 97
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997

FUR FIGHTERS
SYSTEM: DREAMCAST, PC, PLAYSTATION 2, IOS
YEAR: 2000

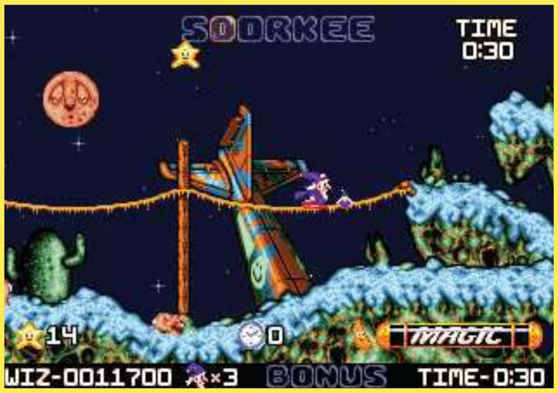
BLUR (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2010



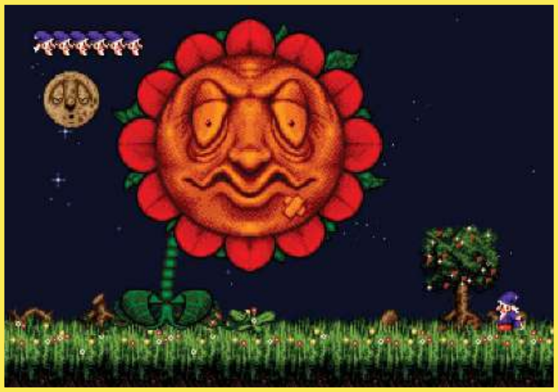
» [Mega Drive] The game's intro shows the wascally spell that steals the wabbits!



» [Mega Drive] Upon saving a wabbit, you'll need to grab the letter that appears before it flies away.



» [Mega Drive] Mike's surreal landscapes give *Wiz 'N' Liz* a lot of its cutesy charm.



» [Mega Drive] The game is very light on enemies, with the bosses being the only combat encounters.

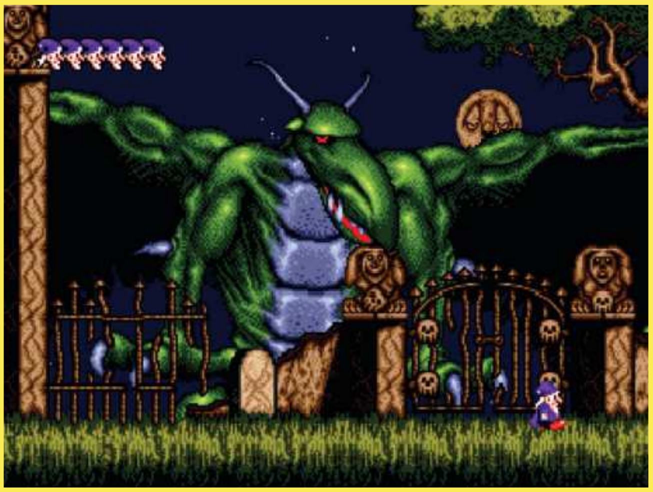
▶ Liverpool to finish the game. "That was the plan, but in fact I never did go home and subsequently rented and bought my first house in Liverpool." *The Killing Game Show* was finally completed and released in 1990, at which point Martyn changed the name of his company to Raising Hell, mainly to reflect his recent sole ownership. Having coded an Atari ST version of the game, the Sega Mega Drive console was released in Europe and selected for another port. "This was a little more complex than anticipated," winces Martyn, "especially squeezing the game onto a 256K cartridge, along with the complete intro movie." But a year later, *Fatal Rewind* (as it was retitled) was released by Electronic Arts, and the young designer and coder had his first brush with what would become a very successful games console; a success which would naturally bring demand for further games. Having experienced the adrenaline rush created by the first *Sonic The Hedgehog* title, Martyn decided he needed to make his own high-speed scrolling game for two players. "I wanted something that was simple to control and super-fast," he says, and so *Wiz 'N' Liz* was born, or rather *Wizzy And Lizzy Save The Fluffy Wuffy Bunny Wabbits*, as the game was known during development.

"I'm pretty sure the idea was my own, but back then we did a lot of casual chatting about games so it could have been a composite of loads of thoughts," continues Martyn. Mike Waterworth, who worked as an artist at Psygnosis and was assigned to work on the game, remembers it differently. "It was all Martyn's idea. As always, he had a strong idea of what he didn't want to make, which was a good starting point." Martyn was keen to avoid the violence which pervaded many games. "I remember at the very start doing a quick sketch of the Wiz and Liz characters, scribbled on stolen Psygnosis headed paper," recalls Mike, "and it pictures Liz about to hit Wiz with a wooden hammer. I was just trying to show some sort of comedic rivalry, but Martyn said it was too violent."

What did pass Martyn's non-violence test was as follows. Set on the magical planet of Pum, where the eponymous characters reside, a rogue spell has taken their beloved wabbits and dispatched them all around the globe. It's up to Wiz and Liz to travel the world and return the creatures back to their home. The action is viewed side-on with every level wrapping around and having its own distinguishing features such as Snow Land, Grass Land, Lunar Land and the charming Dead Land. Within each land are a number of wabbits who must be touched by Wiz or Liz to return them home. Doing so reveals either a letter or a bonus; collecting letters helps form a word, the completion of which reveals the escape door. However, the door remains barred until the player collects all the wabbits. Unusually *Wiz 'N' Liz* features no enemies (other than the end-of-level bosses) – each level is played against a strict time limit with the game definitely living up to its frantic reputation. Furthermore, to give *Wiz 'N' Liz* more substance, there is a spell system where collecting and combining fruit has beneficial effects including extra points, time and some rather cool minigames that include wabbit-fied versions of *Pong*, *Space Invaders* and *Breakout*.

> "THE GAME WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A BIT MARMITE"
> **MARTYN CHUDLEY**

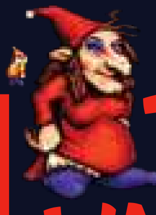
"Mixing each of the combinations of fruit gave the player a different reward," explains Martyn, "and as we had 14 types of fruit it meant we needed over 100 interesting things to give the player. The minigames were obviously the icing on the cake as we didn't want too many bonuses such as 'one extra star' and so on." Mike recalls the friendly rivalry between Martyn and Jon Burton from Traveller's Tales which was developing *Puggsy* at the same time. "I think the variety of the minigames developed in the game because of Martyn's mind needing new stuff to play with. It



» [Mega Drive] *Wiz 'N' Liz*'s bosses are huge, constructed from both the sprite and background layers.

was commonly known about the rivalry with Jon Burton, hence the Splat Those Dudes minigame and my RIP Puggsy background art on the graveyard level." In Splat Those Dudes, the player threw tomatoes at two characters who looked mightily similar to *Puggsy*'s Jon Burton and Andy Ingram. Also in the minigame is Puggsy himself, while the favour was returned as Wiz and Liz appeared on gravestones in the alien's game.

But back to *Wiz 'N' Liz*, and with Martyn on coding and designing duties and Mike creating the graphics, the missing piece of the development was filled by Matt Furniss. "In the early Nineties I was working for Krisalis in Rotherham," he says, "and in addition to creating the sound for all of its games, I would also write music for other developers and publishers – like Psygnosis." Having been one of the first British developers to create a Mega Drive audio development kit and driver, Krisalis had quickly gained a reputation in the UK as the go-to guys for audio on the console, and Matt's pedigree did him no harm. "I'd already worked with Richard Browne [Psygnosis' producer for *Wiz 'N' Liz*] and written some high-profile music for other Sega titles such as *The Terminator* and *Alien 3*." Once on board, Martyn sent Matt early versions of the game which assisted him in getting the feel of the music and sound effects. "I was given free rein. Obviously the fast pace of the game required equally frantic music," he explains, "and as I hadn't done much Mega Drive music at that time, I was still experimenting with the types of sound I could make." In addition to the tunes, Matt created all of the sound effects, most of which are musical in tone, created to enhance the game's base melodies. ▶



THE WIZ 'N' LIZ WASCALLY FACT FILE

WANT TO WABBIT ON ABOUT WIZ 'N' LIZ? HERE'S SOME TRIVIA TO AMUSE YOUR FRIENDS WITH

■ Early on, the game was originally entitled *Wizzy And Lizzy Save The Fluffy Wuffy Bunny Wabbits*.

■ The character at the Sega start-up screen is from Martyn's *The Killing Game Show*.

■ Sega was not keen on the name Raising Hell Studios, hence why the final game features the byline of Mike and Martyn's names at the start-up screen instead.

■ The pumpkin from the game (which would go on to become Bizarre Creations' mascot) was a nod to one of Martyn's favourite bands, Helloween.

■ All the magic words are real. "They were shamelessly taken from the board game *Balderdash*," recalls Martyn. "One of my favourites is 'zneezy', which apparently means cold and frosty."

■ Some of the password cheats are abbreviations. MRCF RSCD gives the player 500 stars and stands for 'Martyn R Chudley For Sarah C Dixon' while TCDT GBBS, a boss select cheat, stands for 'Totally Cool Dude, This Gives Big Baddy Select'.

■ The end game credits were written in the style of *Blackadder The Third*.

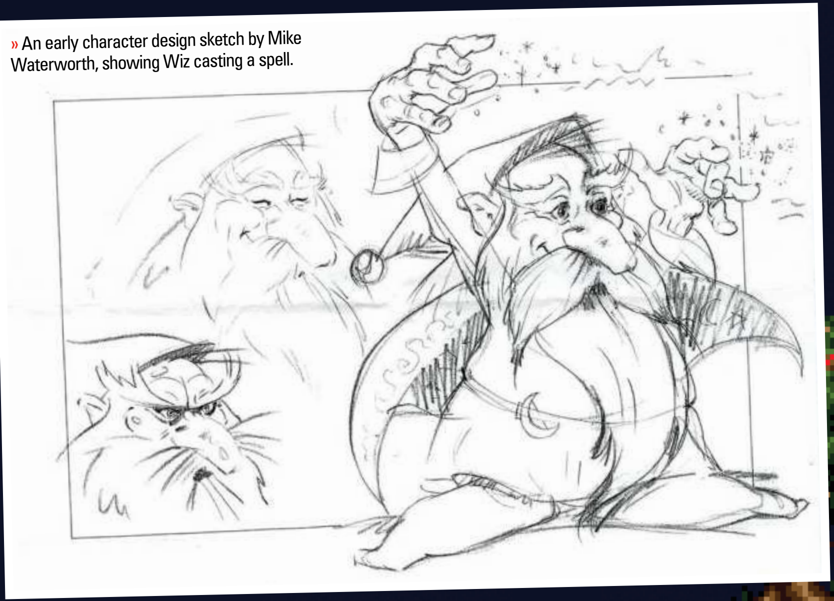
■ The floating asteroid on a rope was inspired by an image of The Little Prince on Asteroid B-612, in a novella by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

■ Many of the silly names were created by Sarah Dixon's brother, Richard. "Who has always been a touch wacky!" laughs Mike.

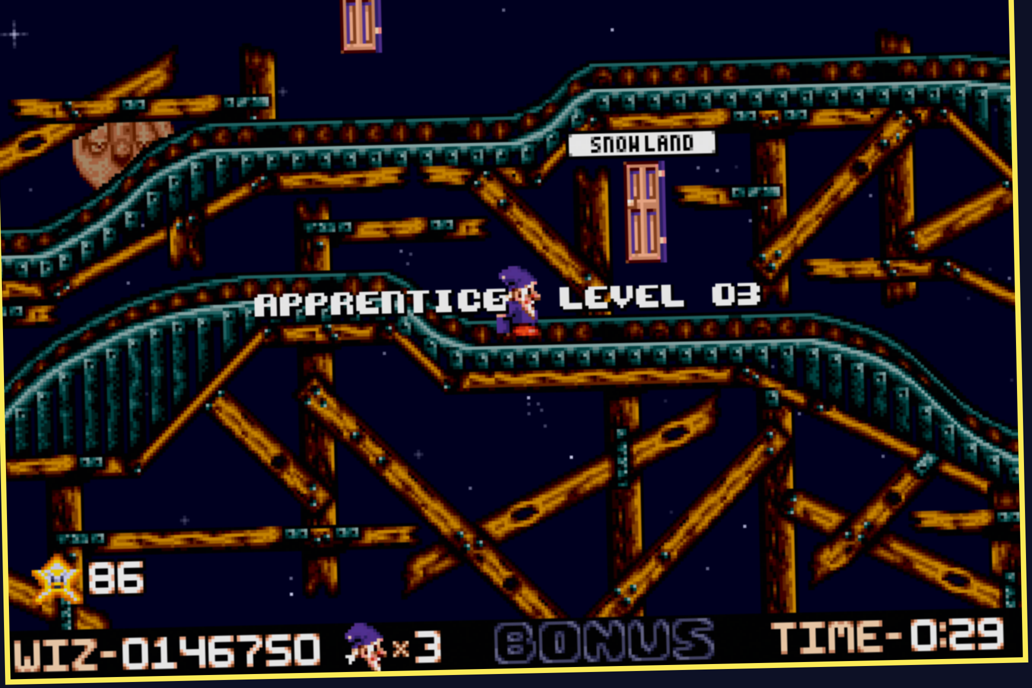
■ According to Martyn, there was a working prototype of the game for the SNES but it was never released, possibly due to close links between Psygnosis and Sony at the time.

■ After forming Bizarre Creations, Martyn also produced a quick port of *Wiz 'N' Liz* to the Sony PlayStation. But as he admits, by then "PlayStation games had just moved on…"

■ As well as Puggsy, there is a cameo from another Psygnosis property, those terminally depressed rodents that we know and love, the Lemmings.



» An early character design sketch by Mike Waterworth, showing Wiz casting a spell.

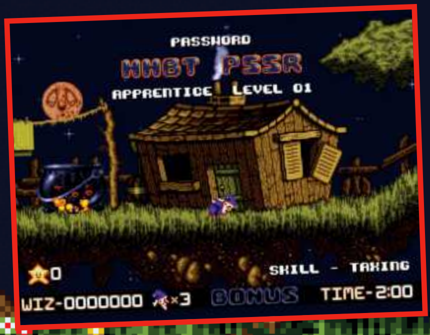


» [Mega Drive] The use of a hub world was quite an unusual feature in the early Nineties.

WORLD WIDE WIZ

WHY DID WIZ 'N' LIZ BECOME A FEATURED GAME ON TV?

■ *Wiz 'N' Liz* had the honour of featuring on Sky One's videogaming Nineties show *Games World* on several occasions. "I made a special version of the game where the user, in this case the TV station, could define the words to collect," explains Martyn. "I think we got quite a bit of exposure because of that – not many developers would go out of their way to create bespoke versions of their games." The show would select the letters and words on a theme; for example, in an episode transmitted on 14 February, the players had to collect letters to form the word VALENTINE. But this wasn't the only time *Wiz 'N' Liz* featured on *Games World*. Diane Youdale, probably known to most as Jet from the TV show *Gladiators*, starred in a regular slot on the show entitled The Peep Parlour, in which she would give out hints to certain games while posing as a character named The Games Mistress. "However for *Wiz 'N' Liz*," says Martyn, "she just commented on a so-called cheat in the game where if you pressed down the A button then the characters farted!"



▶ *Wiz 'N' Liz* was co-designed by Martyn and Mike. With them seemingly on a similar wavelength, were there ever any issues between the two? "The art was completely driven by Mike," says Martyn, "and he just kept creating this cool stuff with a great style. But to his annoyance, I kept rejecting the bits I felt were not suitable!" Yet both were clearly relishing the influence of the famous Sega mascot. "For me, *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a big influence," says Mike. "I was blown away by that game, it was so fast and exciting. I remember being so impressed that when Sonic spins, one frame is just a ball with a drawn highlight." But it wasn't just the blue hedgehog that played a part in the design of *Wiz 'N' Liz* as Martyn remembers. "For the gameplay, *Sonic* was definitely there for the speed and cartoon style. As for everything else, it just came about in a sort of osmosis. Mike would draw something, for example an animation of a dog, which became the wabbits, and we'd take it from there. I liked Sega's arcade game *Flicky* as well, so there's a bit of that in there."

"I GOT TO DRAW A SHARK, THE STATUE OF LIBERTY, THE TARDIS, WHATEVER. IT WAS THE BEST JOB EVER!"
MIKE WATERWORTH

Martyn's other key tenet was to make the game tense; in the absence of any regular enemies, the time limit needed to be finely balanced. "The speed and randomness were there to get the player running around and having fun," he says. "But a little further into the game the time limit becomes very tight. I really wanted the player to experience these little bursts of panic when they realised time was running out. When the last wabbit was saved or the extra time bonus found, the pressure immediately dropped, only to then slowly build up again to another peak later on. You needed to prioritise the need to collect everything with the need to collect a specific item, and allow everything else to literally drift away."

Literally is right. All the items in *Wiz 'N' Liz* have wings and aren't afraid to use them, another device that heightened the need for speed. For Mike, Martyn had created a system where data from backgrounds could be imported into the game very fast. This greatly assisted his freedom to experiment and resulted in some of its crazy backdrops. "It meant the levels could be created and tested very quickly before my final graphics were drawn," recalls Mike, "so I roughly knew the sizes I could draw stuff in each level and had near complete freedom to create what I wanted." This creative freedom resulted in some memorable backdrops in *Wiz 'N' Liz* as Mike recollects. "I got to draw a shark, a submarine, a crashed car, a yeti frozen in a block of ice, an ice-cream van, the Statue Of Liberty, the TARDIS, the Grim Reaper, whatever. It was the best job ever!" Martyn smiles as he recalls this process. "Mike understood exactly how the game and grabbing process worked and he would supply me with a completely drawn out level, which I would then compress and apply the collision detection. That's why there are so many fabulous objects in the backgrounds – Mike has a great imagination and within the *Wiz 'N' Liz* world, anything went!"

Wiz 'N' Liz employed a hub-style menu that had rarely been seen at this point. The player would alternate between the characters' home, a wraparound level containing doors to all the various lands and the eight distinct lands themselves. "I hadn't really thought about that," admits Martyn, "but given that we had the worlds and a fairly cool control method, it seemed natural to tie it together, with the same scrolling and jumping being used to select the levels and mix the fruit." The solution was fun, and fit into the game perfectly, and as the designer explains, was far superior to the alternative proposed. "A menu system was the other way, but it just seemed to break the flow and slow the feel of the game down."

Other than the hub design, the lack of enemies was another novel feature of *Wiz 'N' Liz*. Did its creators ever feel under pressure to include something to shoot? "As far as I can remember, nope," says Martyn firmly. "The game was always going to be cartoony

BIZARRE BAZAAR

THE WARES THAT BIZARRE CREATIONS OFFERED EAGER GAMERS AFTER WIZ 'N' LIZ

12
HILL 5
WILLIAMS RENAULT
THIS LAP
54.7
Official Timing

FORMULA 1

1996

This PlayStation classic was the studio's next release, and was the start of its long association with the racing genre. It was extremely authentic, featuring every track and driver from the 1995 season and commentary from the legendary Murray Walker.

Target Time
25.000
Your Best
31.791
2ND
80 MPH

METROPOLIS STREET RACER

2000

This Dreamcast racer allowed you to race on the accurately recreated streets of London, Tokyo and San Francisco, and rewarded players for skillful driving. It suffered numerous delays and bugs, but provided the basis for Bizarre's later *Project Gotham Racing* series.

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED

2005

The sequel to *Project Gotham Racing 2*'s hidden twin-stick shooter demonstrated just how spectacular high-definition graphics could be in even the simplest of games. It was one of the Xbox 360's early digital hits, and arguably inspired plenty of imitators.

THE CLUB

2008

This third-person shooter was unusual for its time – while others encouraged you to take cover, *The Club* got you constantly moving with arcade-inspired scoring mechanics and racing game influences like time attack modes. It's a **Retro Gamer** team favourite.

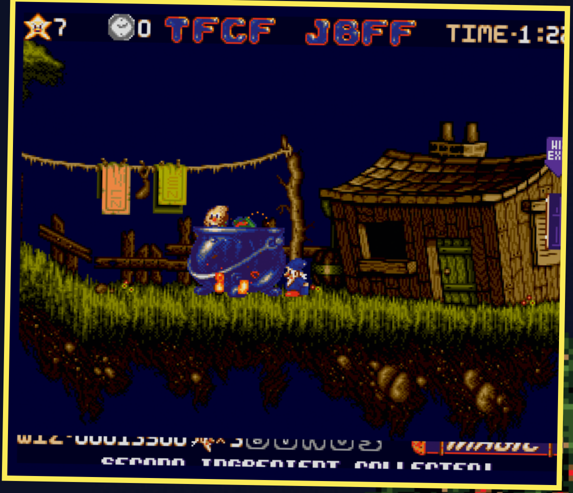
and passive as this was what we felt the Mega Drive audience wanted." With the minigames providing a little scope outside of the normal gameplay, *Wiz 'N' Liz*'s nod to gaming convention is represented by its end-of-level bosses. "The plan was for the wabbits to be initially stolen from the Planet Pum, and the level bosses seemed like logical beings to be responsible for this," clarifies Martyn. "And secondly, it was a chance to show off technically. The Mega Drive was pretty powerful for the time, but the extra trick I used was to create the bosses from a playfield as well as sprites. This way it could be as big as the screen. And with the dragon [*Wiz 'N' Liz*'s final boss] we also exploited a trick where you could shear each column a little, which gave the impression of full-screen rotation." All clever stuff.

Wiz 'N' Liz took 17 months to create according to its end credits. Its cover was drawn not by Mike, but by fellow artist Dave Pether. "His version of the Liz character is by far cuter than my effort," admits Mike and the music and sound from Matt Furniss also impressed him. "I was surprised how it enhanced how the game felt to play – really lovely work." For Matt, *Wiz 'N' Liz* proved to be a major stepping stone as he moved on to *Puggsy* and *Mickey Mania*, the latter of which opened a door for him to a career at Disney.

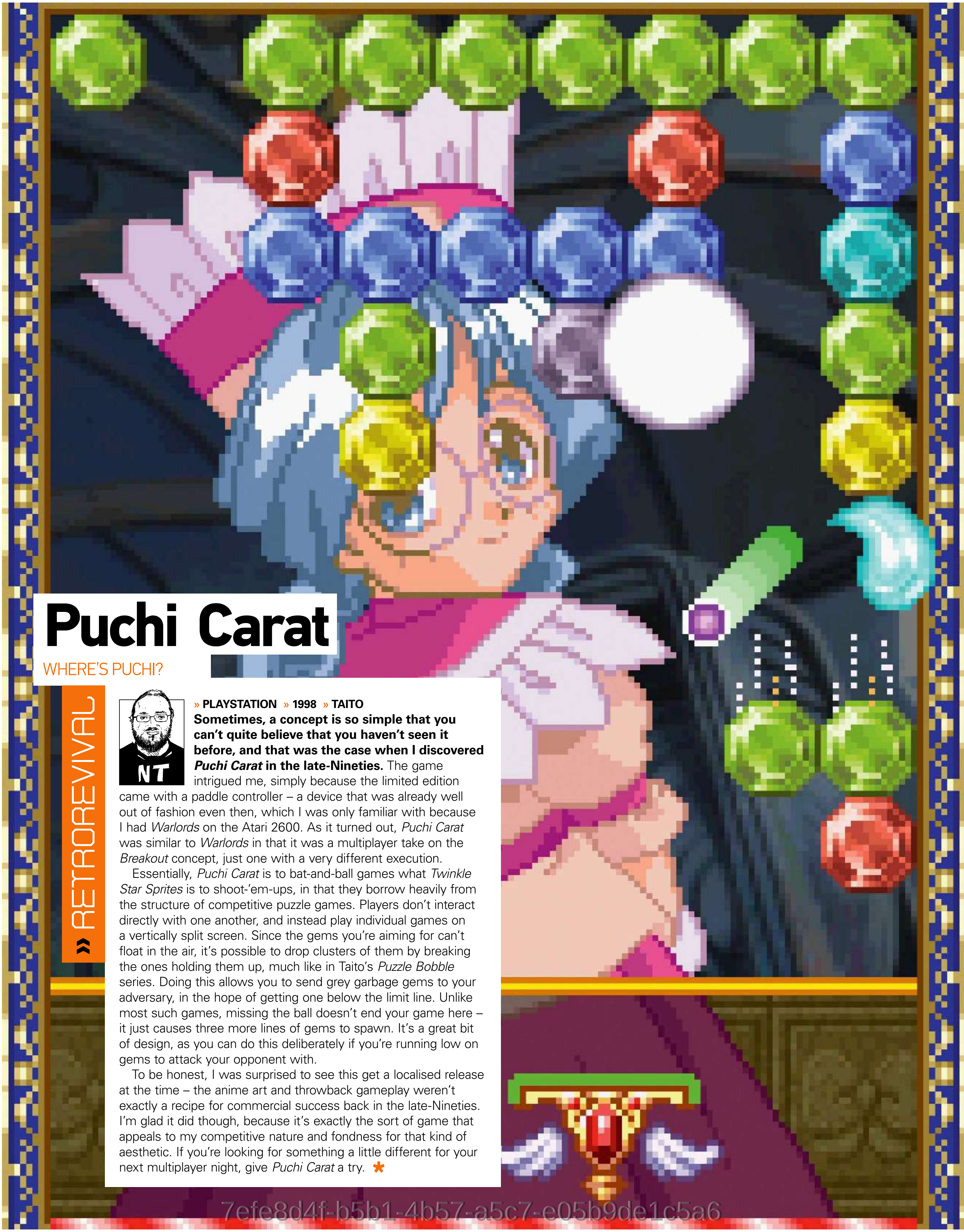
Critical reception to *Wiz 'N' Liz* was varied. "We had our share of 90%-plus scores," remembers Martyn, "as well as lower marks. The game was always going to be a bit Marmite, given it was a bit non-conformist. Some people just got it, others didn't…"

Mike agrees. "I was very young and naïve back then and just thought that good games did well and bad games didn't. I knew we had a terrific game that was fun to play, but wasn't aware of the dark arts of advertising and marketing and how these affected a game's popularity. I'm not saying *Wiz 'N' Liz* wasn't marketed well, but I guess some reviewers just didn't get it." Despite this, both feel very proud of the manic platformer. "I was really pleased with how it came out," says Martyn. "*Wiz 'N' Liz* didn't have the presence of many of the big Mega Drive games of the day, but I could look at it and say it looked good, sounded good and played good – and was non-violent. I felt the balance of the game was spot-on and while it could be easily picked up and played, there was a pretty hardcore game under the surface, particularly on the later levels and at higher skill levels." Says Mike, "It's very different to other games and I love that. I had no original intentions apart from making a game that looked good and was enjoyable to make. I remember a review of the game saying that it looked like we had fun making it – I was very happy with that comment, because we truly did."

And finally, helping Martyn in particular through the vital final stages of development was Sarah Dixon. A Psygnosis employee, she and Martyn met while the latter was working on *The Killing Game Show*. "Sarah was key as the last few months of making the game were horrendously hard," recalls Martyn, "especially with me being the only coder with all that game content, modes, bugs, spells, bosses… and I think she kept me semi-sane and looked after everything for me that wasn't *Wiz 'N' Liz*!" Sarah and Martyn would go on to form Bizarre Creations and get married, thus completing the circle for *Wiz 'N' Liz*. Peace and love, man, peace and love! ✱



» [Amiga] Mixing different combinations of fruit will produce a variety of bonus effects.



Puchi Carat

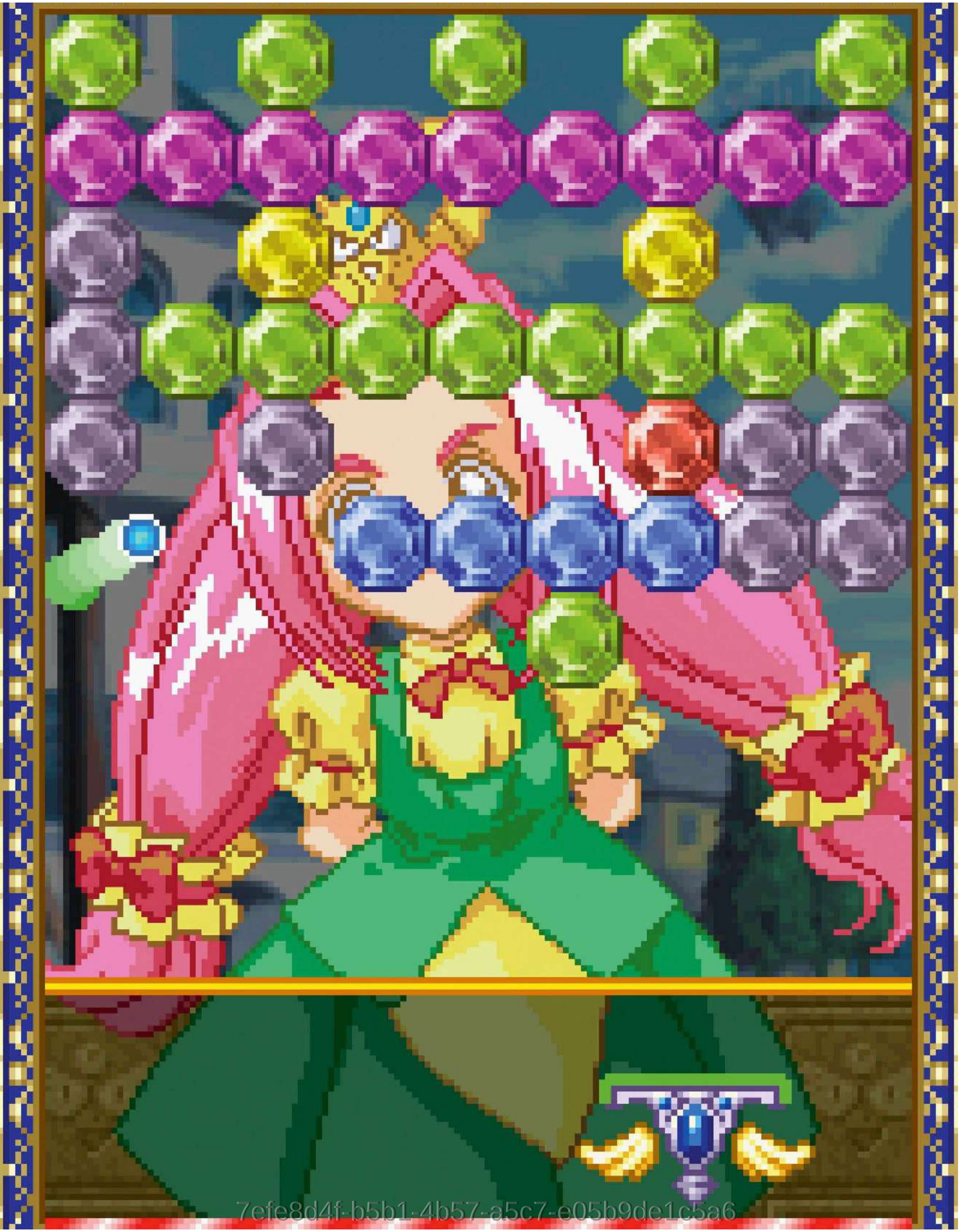
WHERE'S PUCHI?

» PLAYSTATION » 1998 » TAITO

Sometimes, a concept is so simple that you can't quite believe that you haven't seen it before, and that was the case when I discovered *Puchi Carat* in the late-Nineties. The game intrigued me, simply because the limited edition came with a paddle controller – a device that was already well out of fashion even then, which I was only familiar with because I had *Warlords* on the Atari 2600. As it turned out, *Puchi Carat* was similar to *Warlords* in that it was a multiplayer take on the *Breakout* concept, just one with a very different execution.

Essentially, *Puchi Carat* is to bat-and-ball games what *Twinkle Star Sprites* is to shoot-'em-ups, in that they borrow heavily from the structure of competitive puzzle games. Players don't interact directly with one another, and instead play individual games on a vertically split screen. Since the gems you're aiming for can't float in the air, it's possible to drop clusters of them by breaking the ones holding them up, much like in Taito's *Puzzle Bobble* series. Doing this allows you to send grey garbage gems to your adversary, in the hope of getting one below the limit line. Unlike most such games, missing the ball doesn't end your game here – it just causes three more lines of gems to spawn. It's a great bit of design, as you can do this deliberately if you're running low on gems to attack your opponent with.

To be honest, I was surprised to see this get a localised release at the time – the anime art and throwback gameplay weren't exactly a recipe for commercial success back in the late-Nineties. I'm glad it did though, because it's exactly the sort of game that appeals to my competitive nature and fondness for that kind of aesthetic. If you're looking for something a little different for your next multiplayer night, give *Puchi Carat* a try. ✱



THE MAKING OF

The Legend of Heroes: Trails in the Sky SC

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** FALCOM (JPN), XSEED GAMES (USA), GHOSTLIGHT (EUROPE)

» **DEVELOPER:** FALCOM

» **RELEASED:** 2004

» **PLATFORM:** PC, PSP

» **GENRE:** RPG

» From fan to company president, Falcom's Toshihiro Kondo is living the dream.

THE LEGEND OF HEROES IS ONE OF FALCOM'S OLDEST FRANCHISES IN THE JAPANESE COMPANY'S 40-YEAR HISTORY. TOSHIHIRO KONDO, FAN TURNED DEVELOPER AND THE STUDIO'S FUTURE PRESIDENT TELLS US HOW HE LAID THE TRAILS FOR A NEW EXPANSIVE RPG SAGA

WORDS BY ALAN WEN

If there's one thing many beloved Japanese RPG series have in common, it's that regardless of the number at the end, you can largely expect each instalment to be a brand-new adventure with new characters and settings, even if some things like terminology for magic, currency, or enemy types carry over.

Falcom was therefore ahead of the curve with its *The Legend Of Heroes* series (beginning as part of the company's *Dragon Slayer* series) where, from the third entry, it released three games that were actually part of the same world and collectively known as the *Gagharv Trilogy*. It was the first of these games, *The Legend Of Heroes III: Shiroki Majo* (confusingly re-titled in its North American release as *The Legend Of Heroes II: Prophecy Of The Moonlight Witch*) that first caught the attention of Toshihiro Kondo. "The rich, detailed story, captivating characters and warm, inviting world setting got me thinking about just how amazing the care and planning that went into the game was," he says. It was also the beginning of his admiration for Falcom, which for him was simply "the company who made *Shiroki Majo*". It was his fondness for *Prophecy Of The Moonlight Witch* that led to Kondo creating a fan website dedicated to the game during his time as a university student, which became his entry point to joining his dream company, initially to maintain the company's servers before getting the opportunity to try his hand at scenario writing, adding, "In Falcom, even if someone might not have particular experience with something, if they seem capable, they are given a chance to prove themselves." Having also gained experience with managing entire project schedules and even giving direct suggestions to the development team, Kondo acquired the expertise needed to take the helm himself when Falcom decided to develop a new *Legend Of Heroes* title. When that moment came, the *Gagharv Trilogy* would be a constant comparison to measure by.

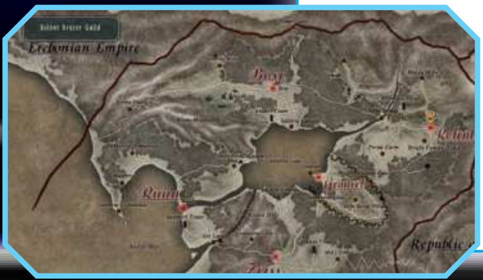
"WE ALREADY HAD THE BASIC IDEA FOR A LARGE CONTINENT LIKE ZEMURIA ON WHICH THE GAMES WOULD TAKE PLACE AND THE SERIES WOULD CONTINUE"

TOSHIHIRO KONDO

Trails In The Sky was however even more ambitious, its setting in the Kingdom Of Liberl merely one nation in the vast continent of Zemuria where many other stories could later be told, with core characters from one arc turning up in another, transforming *Trails* into its own connected series within the *Legend Of Heroes* banner. It's the kind of forward planning we come to expect from the long sagas penned by George RR Martin, or indeed in the many phases of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. While Kondo is more modest of *Trails*' aspirations as a series, he acknowledges that Zemuria served a practical purpose.

"For each part of the *Gagharv Trilogy*, the reset button was hit in terms of setting and world. However, coming up with a new world requires time and skill. For a series to continue in this way, the development costs are high and each time it takes a long time to start actual production," he explains. "So when ▶

» [PC] From the map, you'll notice neighbouring nations including Erebonia and Calvard that make up Zemuria.

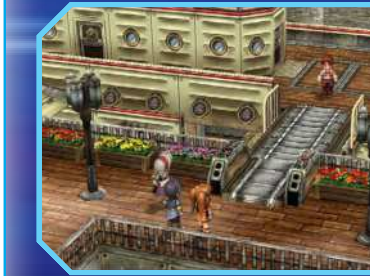


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

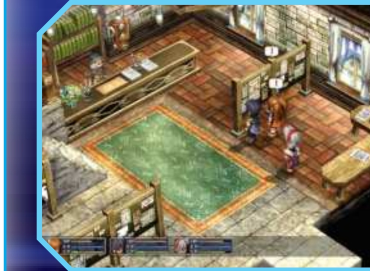
YS ORIGIN
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2006

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS FROM ZERO (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PSP, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2010

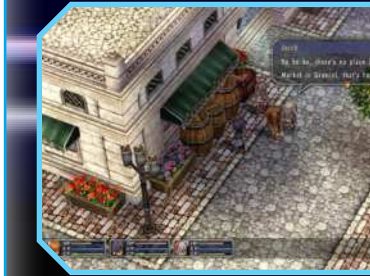
THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION3, VITA, PLAYSTATION 4, PC
YEAR: 2013



» [PC] Despite the title and presence of airships, you actually travel around Liberl entirely on foot.



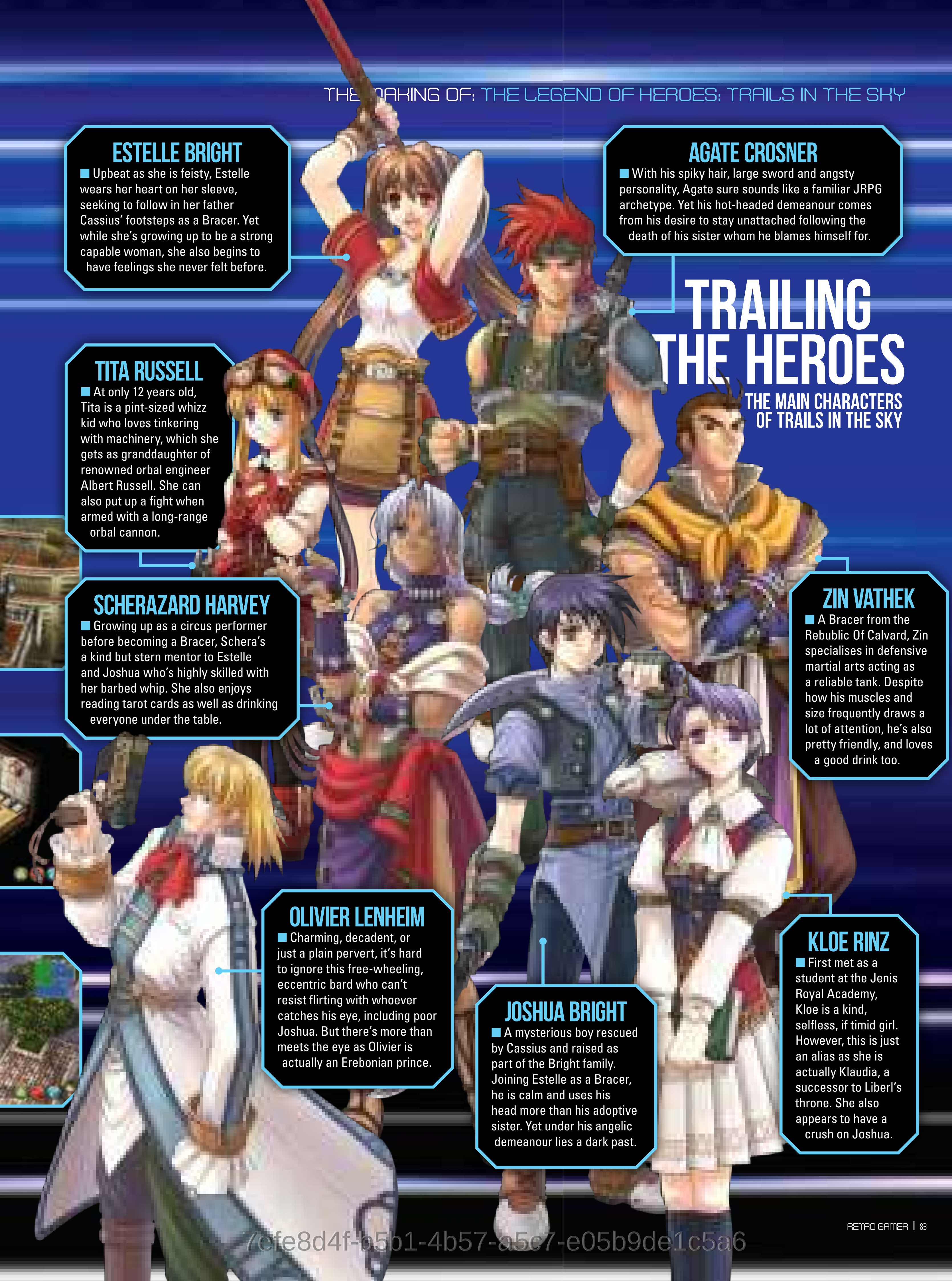
» [PC] New requests come through the Bracer build but also expire once you complete the chapter.



» [PC] Run into this fella later and you're guaranteed he'll have something new to say.

TRAILING THE HEROES

THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF TRAILS IN THE SKY



ESTELLE BRIGHT

■ Upbeat as she is feisty, Estelle wears her heart on her sleeve, seeking to follow in her father Cassius' footsteps as a Bracer. Yet while she's growing up to be a strong capable woman, she also begins to have feelings she never felt before.

AGATE CROSNER

■ With his spiky hair, large sword and angsty personality, Agate sure sounds like a familiar JRPG archetype. Yet his hot-headed demeanour comes from his desire to stay unattached following the death of his sister whom he blames himself for.

TITA RUSSELL

■ At only 12 years old, Tita is a pint-sized whizz kid who loves tinkering with machinery, which she gets as granddaughter of renowned orbal engineer Albert Russell. She can also put up a fight when armed with a long-range orbal cannon.

ZIN VATHEK

■ A Bracer from the Rebublic Of Calvard, Zin specialises in defensive martial arts acting as a reliable tank. Despite how his muscles and size frequently draws a lot of attention, he's also pretty friendly, and loves a good drink too.

SCHERAZARD HARVEY

■ Growing up as a circus performer before becoming a Bracer, Schera's a kind but stern mentor to Estelle and Joshua who's highly skilled with her barbed whip. She also enjoys reading tarot cards as well as drinking everyone under the table.

OLIVIER LENHEIM

■ Charming, decadent, or just a plain pervert, it's hard to ignore this free-wheeling, eccentric bard who can't resist flirting with whoever catches his eye, including poor Joshua. But there's more than meets the eye as Olivier is actually an Erebonian prince.

JOSHUA BRIGHT

■ A mysterious boy rescued by Cassius and raised as part of the Bright family. Joining Estelle as a Bracer, he is calm and uses his head more than his adoptive sister. Yet under his angelic demeanour lies a dark past.

KLOE RINZ

■ First met as a student at the Jenis Royal Academy, Kloe is a kind, selfless, if timid girl. However, this is just an alias as she is actually Klaudia, a successor to Liberl's throne. She also appears to have a crush on Joshua.

TRAILS GOES PORTABLE

HOW FALCOM'S GAME MOVED TO PSP

Following the Japanese PC release of *Trails In The Sky*, a PSP port came two years later, which also served as an enhanced port with a number of extra features. These included New Game+ and new difficulty options, and although there was no easy mode, it did introduce Retry Offset where bosses you failed against would gradually have their stats lowered with each subsequent attempt.

Originally, a handheld port had been considered for the Nintendo DS owing to its larger install base and wider age range of players. "However, when we got our hands on the PSP, we were impressed with its high-quality feel and playability. Our fans at the time were not fans of the mainstream and preferred playing on PC and I would say they had a certain measure of pride in that," Kondo explains. "In other words, we sensed that they would prefer the seemingly more 'grown-up' user experience of the PSP."

It's also with the PSP port that *Trails In The Sky* would belatedly make its way to the West in 2011. While that may have seemed too late, an old school pixel-art JRPG proved a fine fit on a smaller screen for the handheld's twilight years.

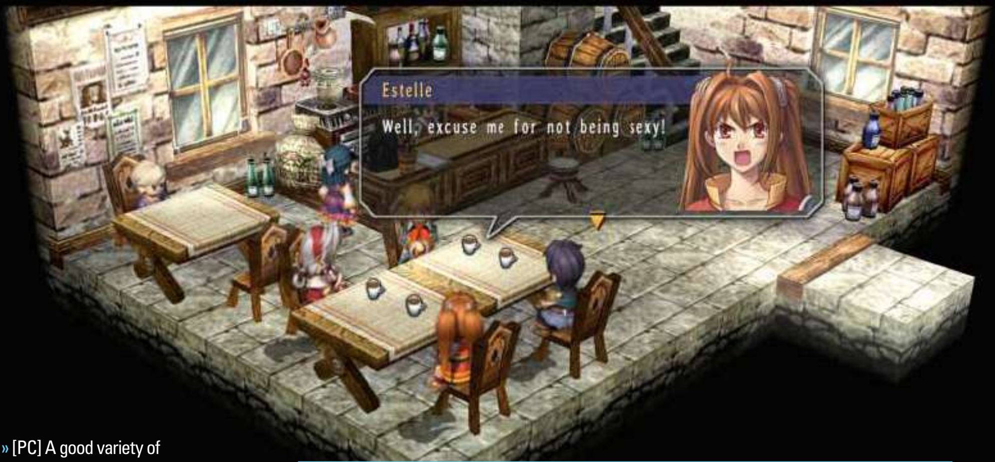
developing *Trails In The Sky*, we already had the basic idea for a large continent like Zemuria on which the games would take place and the series would continue."

Sky also made a departure from the usual fantasy tropes of sword and magic, which had been a staple in both the series as well as other Falcom titles, in favour of the real-world history Kondo had learned in high school, notably the Industrial Revolution. A twist on the retrofuturism of the steampunk genre, the *Trails* series is defined by the Orbal Revolution, an age where machines like telephones and cars exist, powered by quartz containing orbal energy. Incidentally, quartz of various properties can also be crafted and equipped by characters to use the world's equivalent of magic, orbal arts.

Where *Sky* really stood out was having a female protagonist in Estelle Bright, with a coming-of-age arc that sees the young Bracer journeying through the kingdom to search for her missing father while also experiencing the first pangs of romance. Sure, party-based JRPGs may have had their fair share of memorable female characters, but it was still a rarity for one to be the lead, which Kondo admits to being a challenge, adding that up to a certain point in development, Estelle and Joshusa, her adoptive brother and *Sky*'s deuteragonist, actually had opposite personalities from what they were in the final game.

"Once we had decided Estelle was our main character, we made sure to create a woman who would be accepted by both men and women," says Kondo. This also refreshingly meant Estelle eschewed the typical sexualised designs of many female characters of the time, with Kondo recalling that her appearance should be like "someone who was very active and seemed like she would be good at skateboarding or rollerblading". Nonetheless, familiar tropes can still be seen in other party members, such as the precocious but adorable Tita or Scherazard, the sexy, kick-ass, boozy mentor.

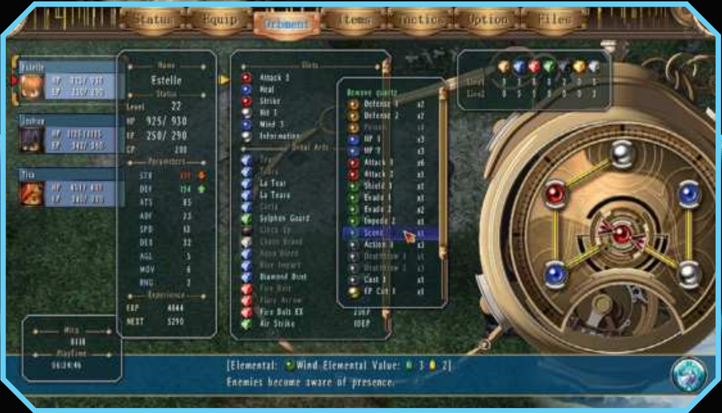
More importantly, *Sky* carried on *The Legend Of Heroes*' tradition for a "well-planned narrative", which didn't just mean the plot's twists and turns, but also the care and attention paid to NPCs, who didn't just have their own names but would also have plenty to say about events happening. Indeed, players who want to talk to every single person would discover that as the story progresses, revisiting locations and talking to the same NPC would yield new dialogue, revealing mini-arcs. "When I was just a player, these NPC stories are what



Estelle

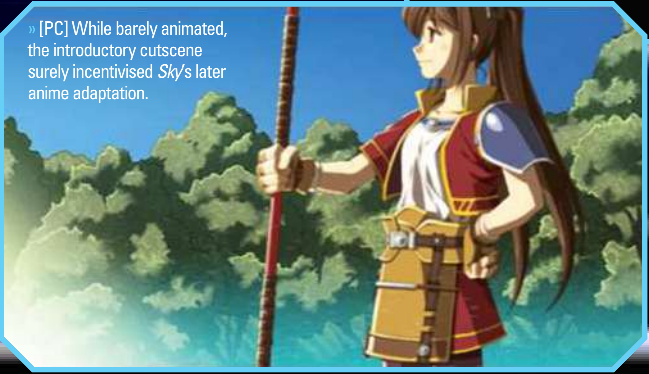
Well, excuse me for not being sexy!

» [PC] A good variety of expressive portraits help convey character emotions from the dialogue.

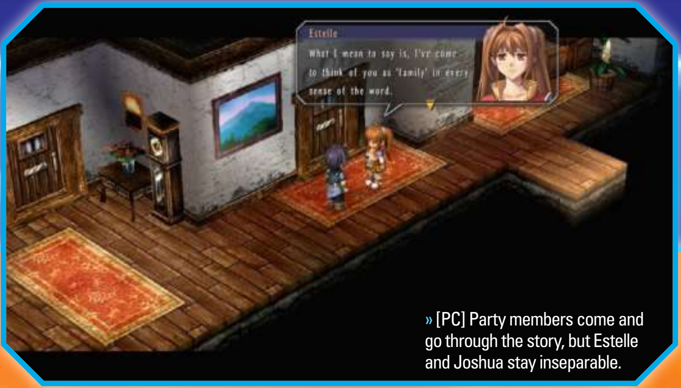


[Elemental: Wind Elemental Value: 3 2]
Enemies become aware of presence.

» [PC] Unlocking more slots and crafting more quartz lets you customise each character's stats and arts.

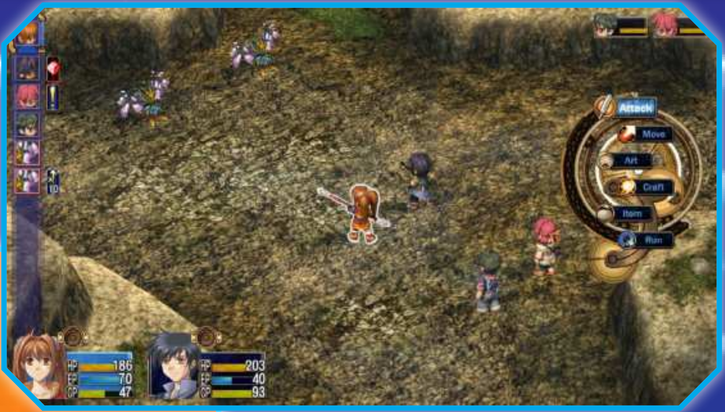


» [PC] While barely animated, the introductory cutscene surely incentivised *Sky*'s later anime adaptation.

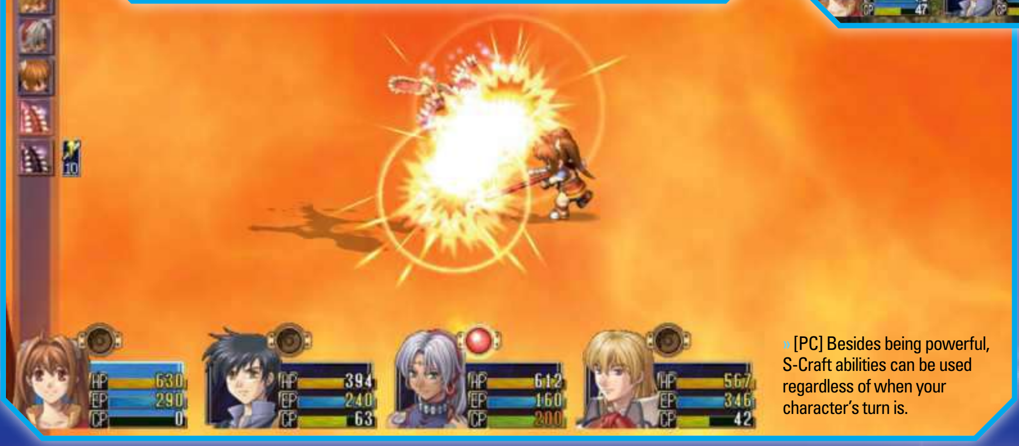

Estelle

What I mean to say is, I've come to think of you as 'family' in every sense of the word.

» [PC] Party members come and go through the story, but Estelle and Joshua stay inseparable.



» [PC] Characters who can't fight sometimes join your party temporarily. If they die, it's game over.



» [PC] Besides being powerful, S-Craft abilities can be used regardless of when your character's turn is.

[Exterminate]
[Leave alone]

» [PC] Monster extermination requests are mostly optional – just make sure you're ready before engaging.

really breathed life into this world for me," says Kondo. "I think that they really are the things that make *The Legend Of Heroes* what it is."

> "WHEN I WAS JUST A PLAYER, THESE NPC STORIES ARE WHAT REALLY BREATHED LIFE INTO THIS WORLD FOR ME"
>
> **TOSHIHIRO KONDO**

Well-planned or not however didn't prevent *Sky*'s story from exceeding its allotted development time, resulting in the game splitting into two parts, while a later epilogue ended up becoming a third full-length game. While not the first example for Falcom – the two-part release of *Ys I* and *II* being what convinced Kondo that it could work – there was nonetheless pressure on the team for the first game to do well in sales. "We were intimidated by our coworkers who said that if the first part didn't sell well, there was no hope for the second part, which was a real confidence killer," he said. "At the time, we were focussed on one title at a time, and, each time a game we released met or exceeded its sales goals, we thought, 'Yes! We live to fight another day!'"

Despite all this rich world-building, the presentation stayed firmly in Falcom's traditional pixel art that it had excelled in since the 8-bit and 16-bit eras. But surely that put *Sky* in a tough position in 2004, at the peak of the sixth console generation's high-fidelity 3D graphics, with the seventh generation not far behind that would also usher in HD gaming? After all, even the ultra-traditional *Dragon Quest* series took the leap to 3D in the same year.

At the time, Kondo was unperturbed, since Falcom's games were still made specifically for the Japanese PC market, so there wasn't pressure to compete with other trends outside of that environment. "Where it really became apparent about the difficult state of the PC market for us was right before the release of a title called *Zwei II* in 2008," he explains. "At the time, physical releases of games in the PC market was standard, and there were many people who said they wanted to play our games, but shops stopped carrying the physical releases of PC games. It was then that we decided to go into the console market."

The real challenge however was delivering *Sky* to an audience beyond Japan, which would not happen until Kondo became president of Falcom in 2007, and even then required a few more years to make happen. Typically, JRPGs would be developed in Japanese first and it was only until the end of development when the games would be translated for other markets. However, Falcom didn't – and still doesn't – have its own localisation department, relying instead on partnering with other publishers.

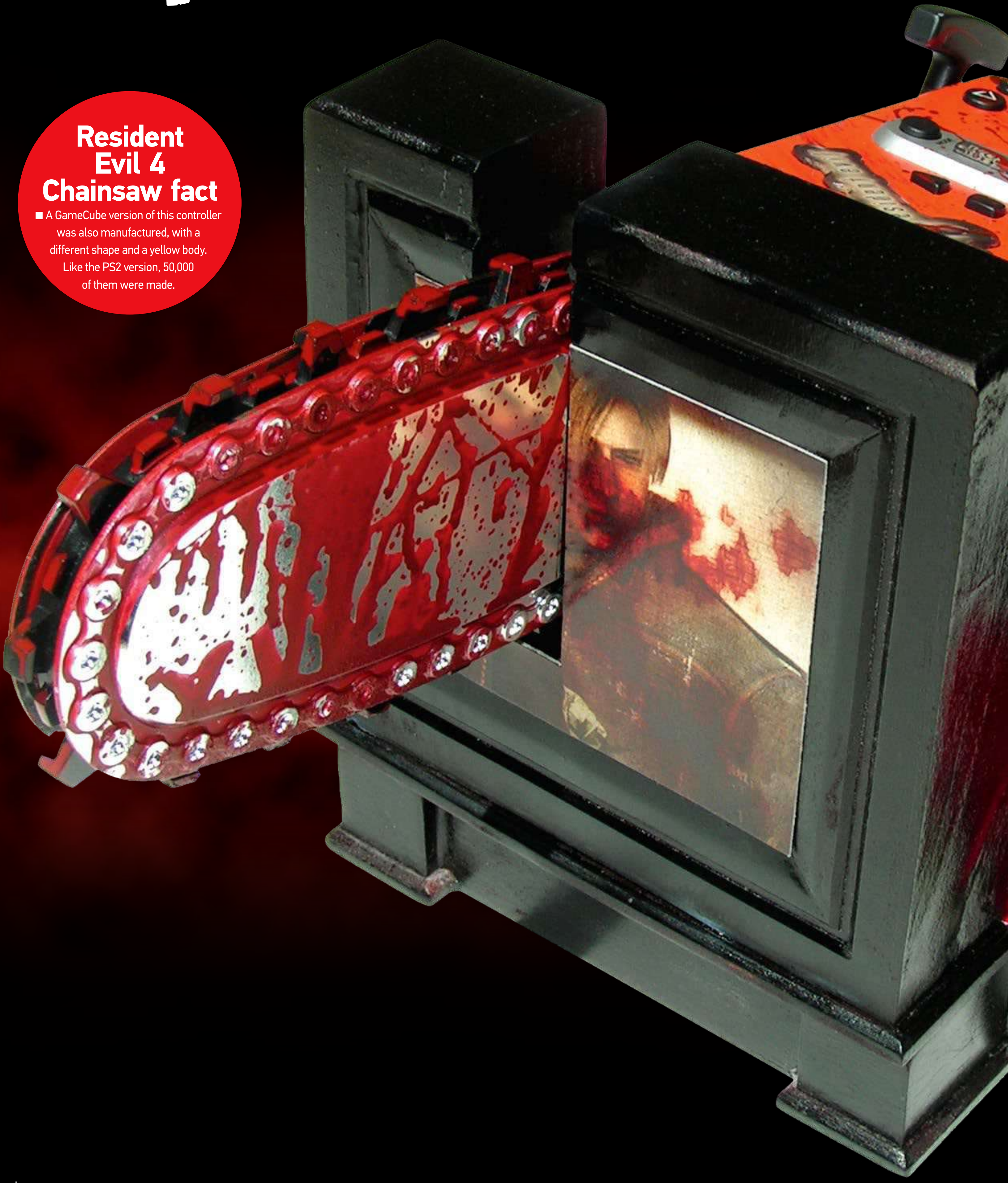
But given the time and cost involved in translating huge amounts of text, coupled with how traditional JRPGs had fallen out of fashion in the late-Noughties, publisher Bandai Namco, who had belatedly localised the *Gagharv* trilogy, declined to do the same with *Sky*. "We approached various other Western publishers but were turned down for the same reasons: that it would just not make financial sense," explains Kondo. "In the midst of that, it seemed that anime and Japanese games were beginning to increase in popularity and XSeed decided to take on the challenge. We were grateful for that."

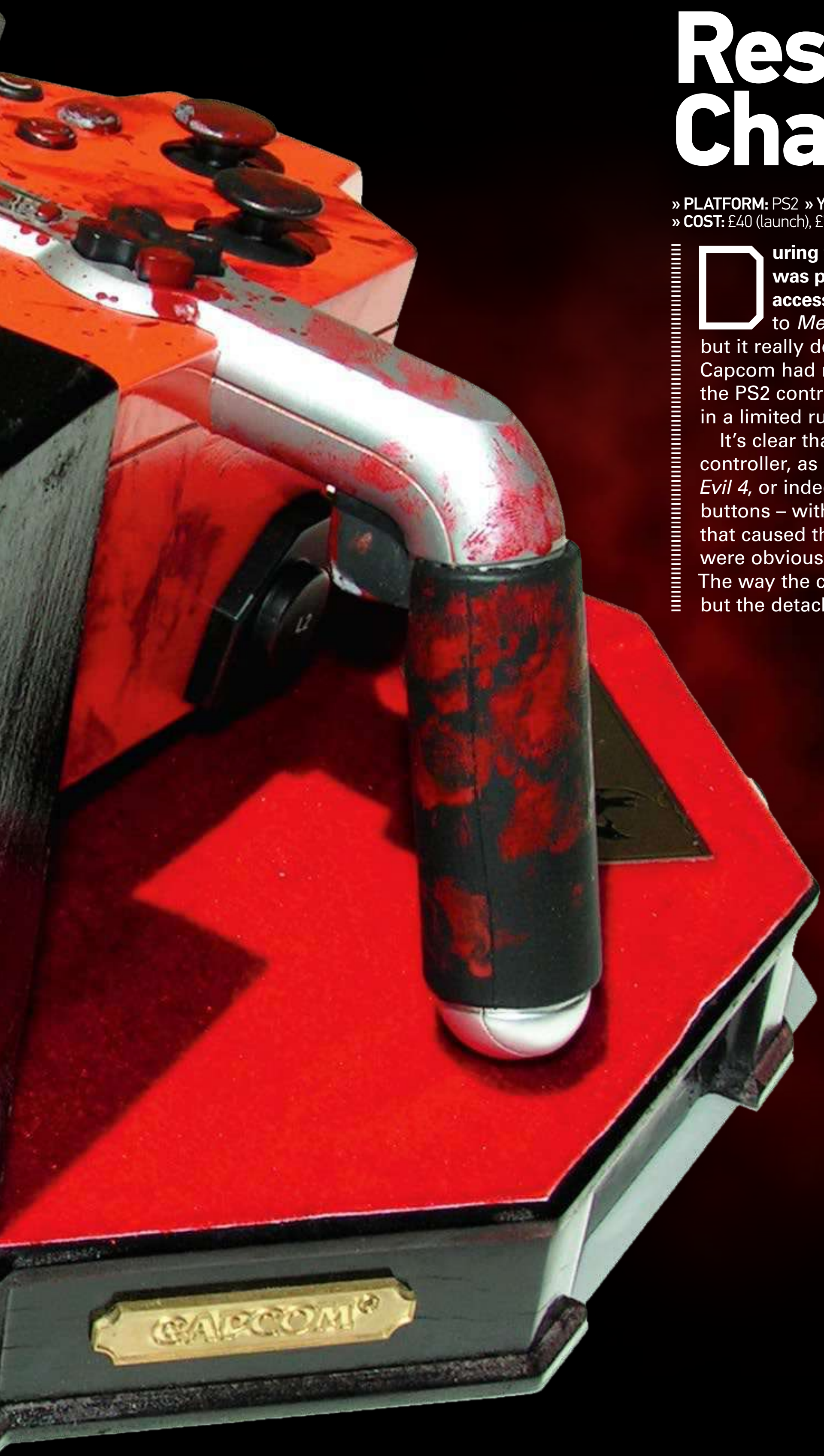
So should we be too, as renewed interest in Japanese games in the West has also seen subsequent titles in the *Trails* series reach new fans, with Kondo playing a key part in ensuring new audiences around the world are able to appreciate these captivating worlds and characters, as each new convert may reach the same conclusion as when he was first introduced to *The Legend Of Heroes* all those years ago.

Currently, the *Trails* series has covered the Erebonian Empire with *Trails Of Cold Steel*, Falcom's first fully 3D RPG, while the long-awaited *Trails From Zero* – the first part of two from the Crossbell arc – has also finally arrived on Western shores after being overlooked for localisation for over a decade. Even the *Sky* trilogy has received localised ports on Steam, though the question remains whether we'll see this original arc on more platforms in future. While Kondo doesn't get into the specifics, he nonetheless assures us, "As the origins of the *Trails* series, we have always wanted these games to be available in an easily playable, easily obtainable form. I don't know what other forms that will eventually take, but we want to make that a reality." *

Resident Evil 4 Chainsaw fact

■ A GameCube version of this controller was also manufactured, with a different shape and a yellow body. Like the PS2 version, 50,000 of them were made.





Resident Evil 4 Chainsaw

» **PLATFORM:** PS2 » **YEAR:** 2005
» **COST:** £40 (launch), £75+ (today, boxed), £50+ (today, unboxed)

During the era of the PS2, peripheral manufacturer NubyTech was particularly keen on using licensed brands to help sell its accessories. One of its frequent partners was Capcom, leading to *Mega Man* control pads and *Street Fighter* arcade sticks, but it really decided to push the boat out for *Resident Evil 4*. Just as Capcom had reinvented the survival horror series, NubyTech reinvented the PS2 controller into a chainsaw-shaped device which was produced in a limited run of 50,000 units.

It's clear that NubyTech prioritised form over function with this controller, as it is fully functional but far from ideal for playing *Resident Evil 4*, or indeed any other game. It features all of the usual sticks and buttons – with the exception of Start, which is replaced by a pull cord that caused the controller to make a revving sound. Design decisions were obviously made with the goal of having it look good on a shelf. The way the chainsaw pokes through the durable packaging is very nice, but the detachable controller cable isn't since it can easily be lost. *

ESSENTIAL GAME

HELLO KITTY: ROLLER RESCUE

Yes, *Resident Evil 4* is brilliant. Yes, this controller bears *Resident Evil 4* branding. No, you shouldn't actually use it to play *Resident Evil 4*. Why not? Because the raw aggression that will build inside you as you hold the controller will inevitably be unleashed by the stress of the game itself, and you'll somehow manage to actually slaughter people with it. Don't take the risk of becoming the next videogame violence headline. Enjoy *Resident Evil 4* with a proper pad, and use this to reaffirm your masculinity while playing children's games.

RETURN TO MONKEY ISLAND™

MORE THAN THREE DECADES SINCE CREATING A TIMELESS GOLD STANDARD FOR THE POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE GENRE BEFORE SAILING ONTO NEW HORIZONS, RON GILBERT AND DAVE GROSSMAN REUNITE AND SHARE THEIR JOURNEY ON THEIR RETURN TO MONKEY ISLAND

WORDS BY ALAN WEN

» It has taken many years, but Ron Gilbert has finally made a new *Monkey Island* game.

» Dave Grossman has been working alongside Ron Gilbert on *Return To Monkey Island*.

In the book *Blood, Sweat & Chrome*, an oral history of more than 100 interviewees recounts the long trials and tribulations that filmmaker George Miller took to follow his post-apocalyptic movie franchise *Mad Max* with 2015's critically acclaimed *Fury Road*, a project that had been gestating for about 20 years.

That however isn't the story you'll read for *Return To Monkey Island*, even though it's taken more than three decades for the series' original creator Ron Gilbert to be back at the helm. Joining him is co-designer Dave Grossman, who explains the development timeline was actually simpler. "The vision for this game came initially out of a weekend that Ron and I spent together in January of 2020, where we talked about what kinds of themes and subject matter held meaning for us, and where we could take them. It's not a game we would have or could have made 30 years ago."

In the past, Ron Gilbert had toyed with the idea of making another *Monkey Island* game before, which would always be set immediately after the end of *Monkey Island 2*'s still divisive conclusion, having joked in a 2002 interview with LucasArts fansite The International House Of Mojo that it would be called *Monkey Island 3a: The Secret Revealed Or Your Money Back*. But there was no grand design document stuck in development hell for decades.

What Dave means then is that it has required the natural passing of time for the pair to consider what *Monkey Island*, as well as its forever hapless yet nonetheless aged pirate Guybrush Threepwood, meant for them in the present. There's an evident play for nostalgia and desire to recapture the glory days that's also been inherent in other long-overdue sequels of films where the audience has also grown up with the actors and the characters they portray, be it *Star Wars*, *Top Gun*, or *Clerks*.

It was also a case of waiting for the stars to align. Since *Monkey Island* and all other LucasArts IP were acquired by Disney, Ron had taken to Twitter to express his interest in buying the rights for both *Monkey Island* and *Maniac Mansion*, bolstered by a fan petition, but to no avail. Even now, Ron confirms he still doesn't own the rights, but *Return* was made possible through publisher Devolver Digital, whose founder Nigel Lowrie actually had a connection with Disney.

From there on it was a case of getting the gang back together, beginning with Dave Grossman, as well as programmer David Fox and original composers Peter McConnell, Michael Land and Clint Bajakian. Although the first two original games were text only, it was also a coup to have on the project voice actor Dominic Armato, who has been the voice of Guybrush since *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, as well as for the *Special Edition* remakes.

"We did start the project without knowing whether Dom would be willing and able to work with us," Dave admits. "But we didn't have any sort of contingency plan for how we'd do it without him. Neither of us does a particularly good Guybrush impression. So I'm delighted Dom was available, along with some of the other cast members."

Building from two people to twenty-five at its peak, Terrible Toybox was larger than the LucasArts team that developed *The Secret*

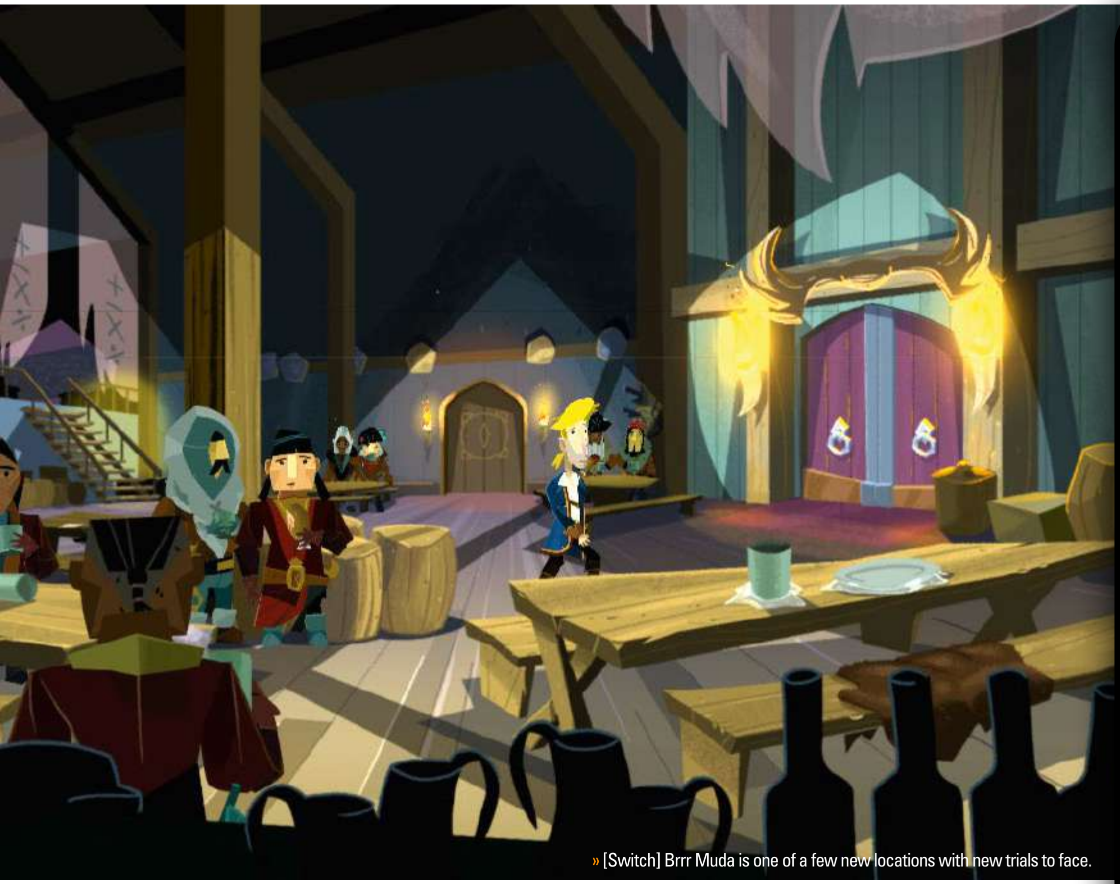
▶

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** DEVOLVER DIGITAL
- **» DEVELOPER:** TERRIBLE TOYBOX
- **» RELEASE:** OUT NOW
- **» PLATFORM:** MAC, PC, SWITCH
- **» GENRE:** ADVENTURE

HALF-OFF
SALE
REAL VO
GOING OUT OF BUSINESS

» [Switch] Guybrush and Elaine's interactions are sweetly observed with minimal dialogue to show the couple's affections.



» [Switch] Brrr Muda is one of a few new locations with new trials to face.

PAPER CUTS

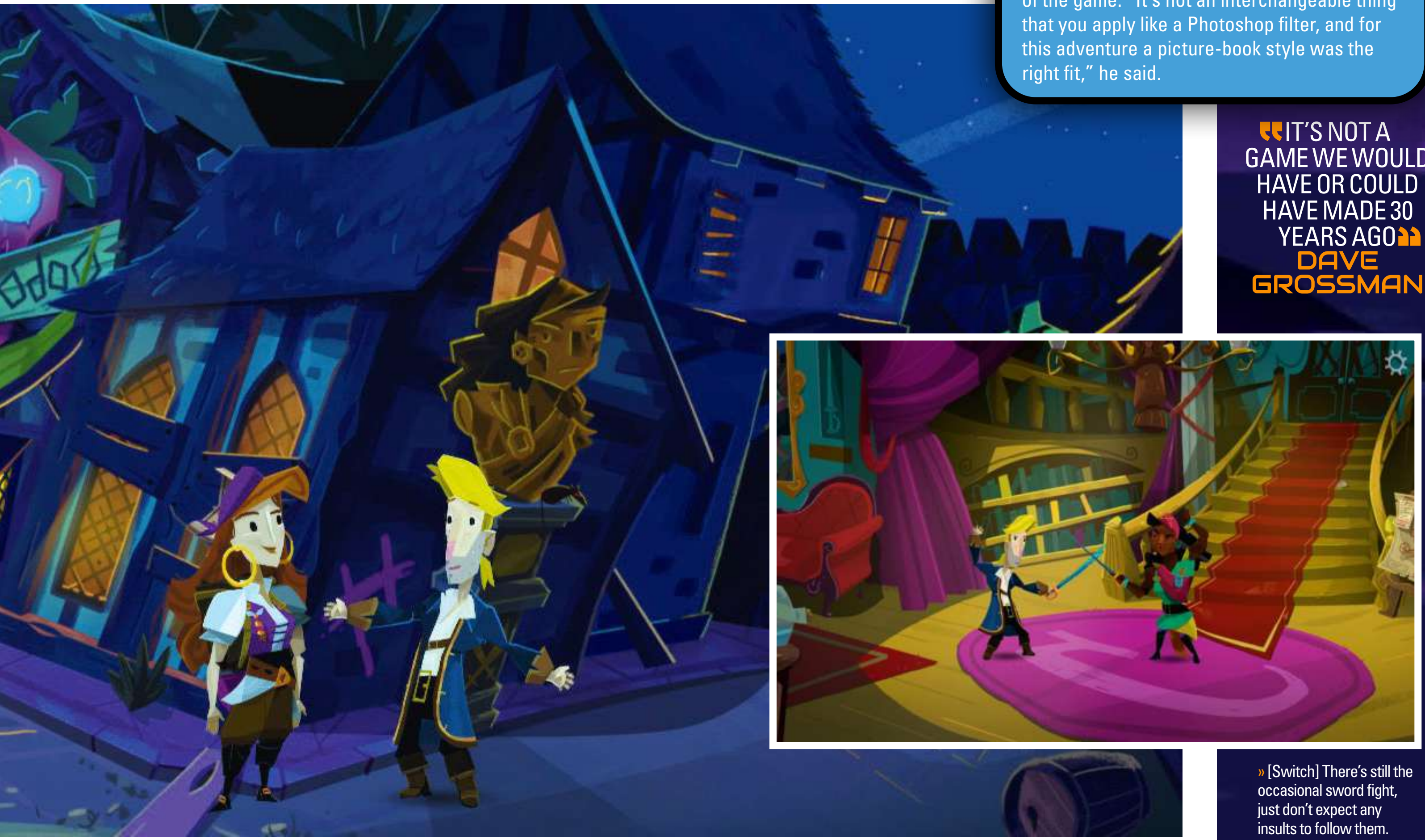
Addressing the new papercraft look

While the surprise of a new *Monkey Island* game delighted fans, not everyone necessarily felt the same way about the new art style, which jettisons the look of Steve Purcell's original illustrations for something far more stylised. Based on a rather ugly vocal minority, you'd be forgiven for believing this to be the biggest backlash against a series' change of aesthetic since the *Wind Waker*'s cel-shaded Link.

Yet just like that game, the reasoning behind the new art style does make sense once you see it in motion. They're certainly more expressively animated than the original pixel art, which in any case only conveyed Steve's artwork during close-ups. Indeed, art director Rex Crowle, also known for his distinct papercraft-inspired art for *Tearaway* and *Knights And Bikes*, was given the job after Ron recalled seeing a stylised Guybrush Rex had sent him many years ago.

Speaking to *PC Gamer*, Rex explained that the picture-book aesthetic in *Return* was taken because it also matched with the core themes of the game. "It's not an interchangeable thing that you apply like a Photoshop filter, and for this adventure a picture-book style was the right fit," he said.

> IT'S NOT A GAME WE WOULD HAVE OR COULD HAVE MADE 30 YEARS AGO
> **DAVE GROSSMAN**



» [Switch] There's still the occasional sword fight, just don't expect any insults to follow them.

FLICK BOOK

Taking inspiration from a cult cinema classic

When it comes to pirates on the big screen, they don't get bigger than Disney's *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, so you might assume there would be some parallels between that blockbuster franchise with *Monkey Island*, now of course also owned by the House Of Mouse. But while both Guybrush and Jack Sparrow can be seen as foolish bumbling pirates, it's perhaps wise that Ron's third outing didn't take any notes from that series, which had begun to take itself too seriously as new films were released.

Instead, the most overt influence *Return* has comes from the 1987 swashbuckling comedy adventure *The Princess Bride*. Of course, this cult classic has been referenced in past instalments, including Guybrush's introduction in sword fighting duels, "My name is Guybrush Threepwood. Prepare to die!" but this game goes further by taking that film's clever narrative framework of a grandfather reading his a book to his sick bed-bound grandson, only here it's an older Guybrush recounting his adventure to his son, with just as many humorous interjections throughout. To tweak one of the classic quotable lines, "When I was your age, videogames were called books. And this is a special book."

▶ *Of Monkey Island* back in 1990, while development took twice as long, but also accounted for new additions in the production pipeline, from recording dialogue to more advanced animations. It's certainly not triple-A scale but far from a scrappy indie project then.

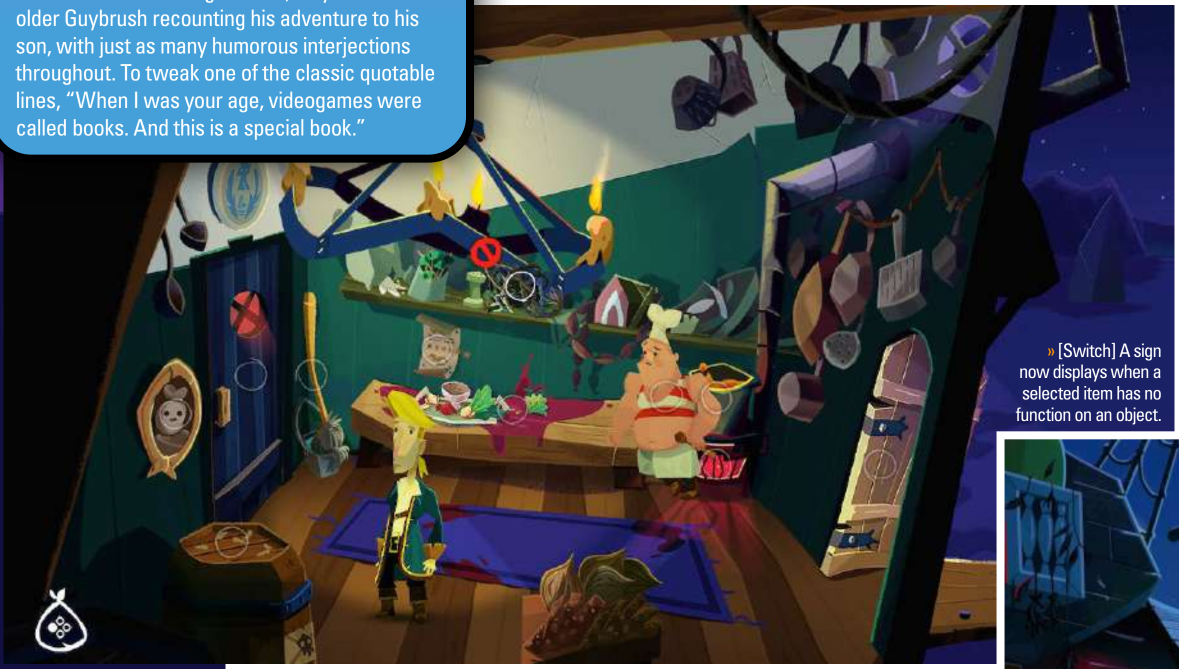
Indie or not – Ron nonetheless believes the team has an indie mentality of 'let's get stuff done, let's try to innovate, let's move quickly' – it didn't affect the scope of what *Return* set out to achieve. "The aim from the beginning has been to make something in the ballpark of one of the earlier *Monkey Island* games in terms of the scope as it's felt by the player, and the budget was drafted to fit that requirement, rather than the other way around," explains Dave.

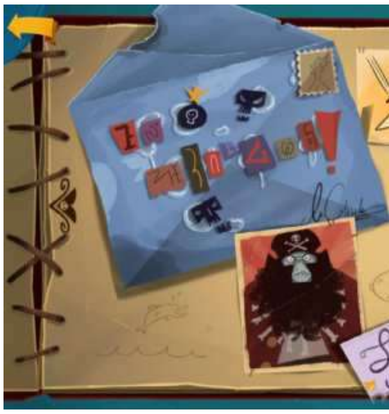
As a game designed to harken back to the past for series fans, there is something of a familiar structure as Guybrush begins his adventure back on the Island Of Mêlée, once again figuring out how to get to Monkey Island and uncover its secret for real this time. "It was great working with Dave again, we've always had a lot of fun," adds Ron. "We've worked together on projects since *Monkey Island* and I've always had a great deal of respect for him – particularly his writing and creativity – so it was really good to work with him again on this project."

Yet this isn't just meant to be a tired retread. Players may recognise the Scumm Bar or the streets further down but some establishments also look worse for wear while a couple other new businesses have also sprung up. In this familiar location, there are new things to say instead of just replaying the hits. In other words, don't expect to be getting into any insult-based sword fights.

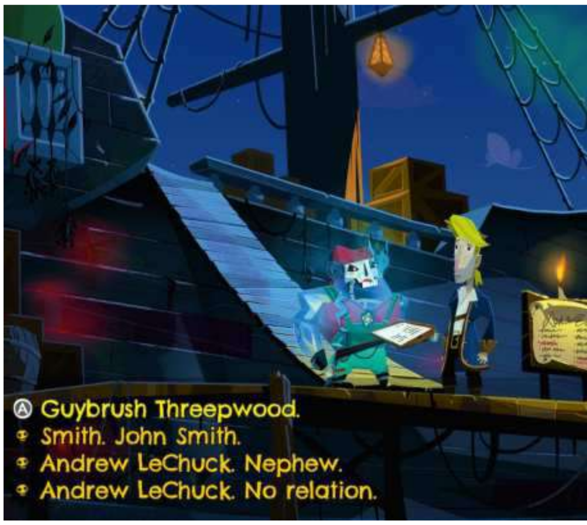
"There was no insult sword fighting in *Monkey Island 2*, either," Ron counters. "Some of the other games did a version of it but we felt like we didn't want to do a parody or riff on insult sword fighting, so to speak. *Monkey Island* was iconic and we wanted to leave it that way. I don't know that we could have done it better." Whether the new puzzles and setpieces will leave the same memorable impression on players will be another matter, which we'll of course not spoil.

What we can say is that, while *Return* remains fundamentally a point-and-click adventure, there are modern quality-of-life improvements that make everything smoother, especially if you're playing on Switch rather than PC, in which case you have a choice of more intuitive game controls where you can



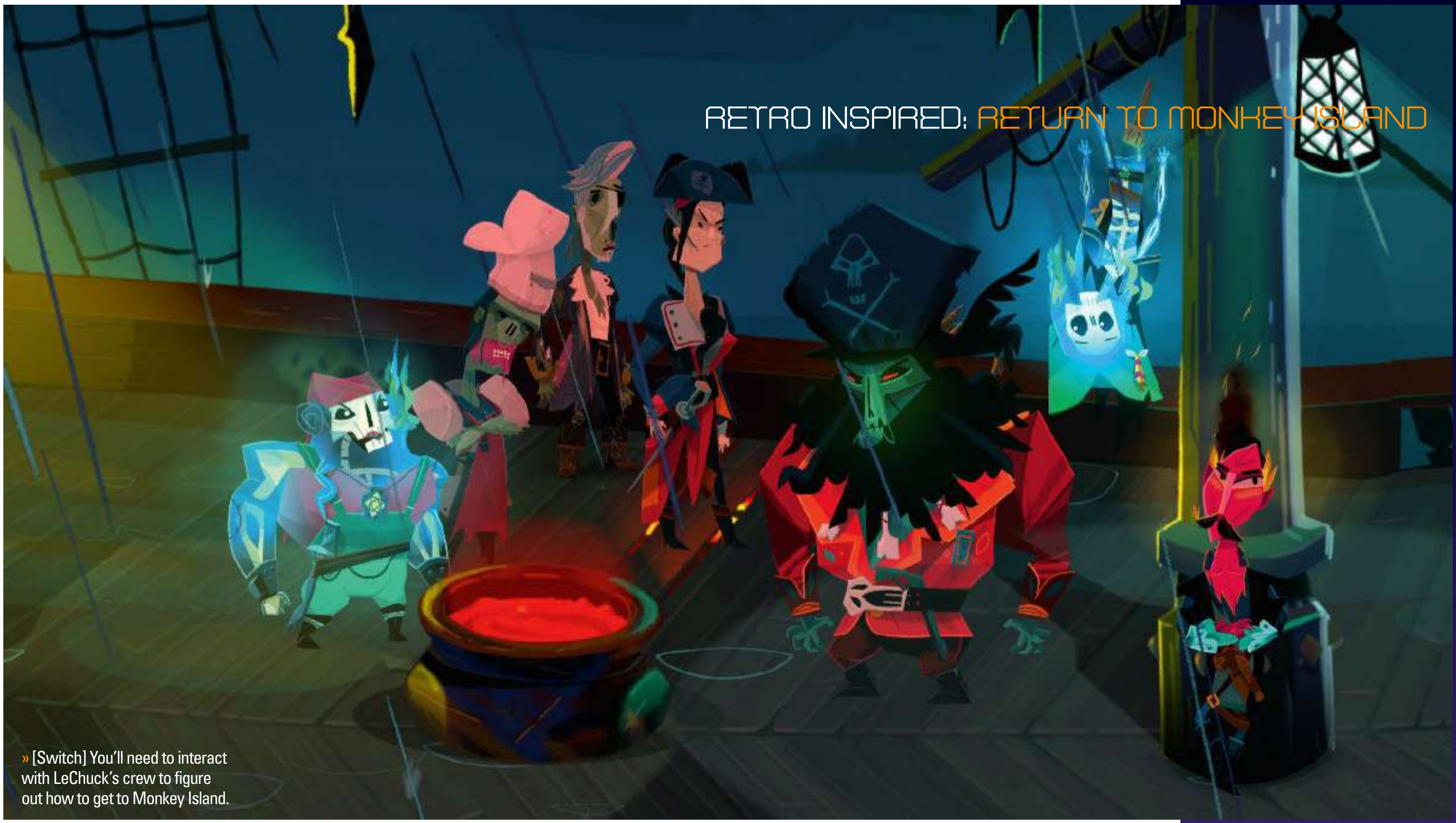


» [Switch] A sign now displays when a selected item has no function on an object.

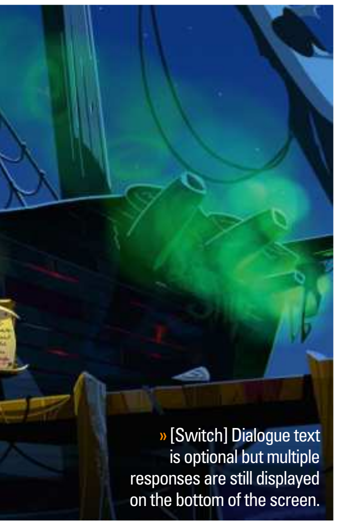


Ⓐ Guybrush Threepwood.
• Smith. John Smith.
• Andrew LeChuck. Nephew.
• Andrew LeChuck. No relation.

» [Switch] Mêlée's pirate leaders are back, just don't expect them to be the same ones.



» [Switch] You'll need to interact with LeChuck's crew to figure out how to get to Monkey Island.



» [Switch] Dialogue text is optional but multiple responses are still displayed on the bottom of the screen.

move Guybrush around with the stick or even play using the touchscreen.

"Our scientists have been toiling away in their windowless underground laboratories for 30 years, working to improve the player experience, aiming at the perfect, frictionless pathway to fun. They haven't accomplished anything so grand as that, of course, but they have made a few improvements," Dave jokes.

The most welcome improvement to *Return* is an extremely robust in-game hint book to help any players who get stuck. It's a great addition, whether you're a newcomer to the genre who just prefers to get through the story with as little friction as possible or even a veteran who doesn't have all day to bash their head against a proverbial wall to figure out a solution. Even here though, things have moved on from the SCUMM days so you've also got an up-to-date to-do list to keep track of your quests while interacting with items is done via a more intuitive drag-and-drop system.

The biggest puzzle that longtime fans may be wondering how to solve is just how would Ron and Dave carry on their story from after *LeChuck's Revenge* while also co-existing with the games that came after that Ron was not a part of? When modern fandoms have a tendency to get very pedantic about what is or isn't canon in a franchise universe, it's here that *Monkey Island*'s saving grace is that it doesn't need to take itself so seriously, even if that's not necessarily the answer that will satisfy some people.

"All of the games in the series are canon as far as I'm concerned, and *Return To Monkey Island* won't change anything about that," says Dave. "I wouldn't be comfortable changing anything about that. I don't even think it's up to us – canon is the domain of the audience. As with many things in life, it's probably best not to overthink it, or to ask too many questions."

If there have been some genuinely tricky problems, it's more from the technical side of just trying to get the game together in one working piece. "This is true for every project ever, the technical things we go round and round about the most are always related to the dumbest stuff," Dave explains. "Getting animations to work well with each other, for example, so that characters are actively engaging with the world around them but where we also want the player to have free rein to mess with whatever they want at any time without suddenly making Guybrush's head pop off. If we could just take the pesky player out of the picture and make a movie instead, it would be so much more straightforward."

From the team's formation, work on *Return* was done in utmost secrecy until the game was finally teased by Ron on Twitter this year on 1 April (keeping his promise that if he ever made a new *Monkey Island* game it would be announced on April Fools Day) then formally announced a few days later through Devolver's channels. "The response has been fantastic!" says Dave. "I mean I suppose if we had been met by a chorus of crickets there would be less pressure to do a good job, but I much prefer it this way."

As for whether it will meet fan expectations, Ron concedes, "It's a bit intimidating knowing what *Monkey Island* means to so many people, it's sometimes terrifying because it doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. But in the end, we're going to make a game that makes us happy and that should make a lot of other people happy. That's what we did with the first *Monkey Island*." ★

> IT'S A BIT INTIMIDATING KNOWING WHAT MONKEY ISLAND MEANS TO SO MANY PEOPLE
>
> **RON GILBERT**

90 Minutes: Sega Championship Football

A RAINY 0-0 DRAW OF A GAME

NT

» DREAMCAST » 2001 » SMILEBIT

Back when I was in my first year at university, most students hadn't brought a TV along to their flats. Not only did I have one, but I bought a Freeview box specifically to watch *Torchwood*, so my friends would often drop in to watch shows like *Scrubs* with me. I also had a Wii and a Dreamcast hooked up, and I ended up buying a TurboGrafx. This reputation as the gamer of the flat came back to bite me one night, when a flatmate knocked on my door and thrust a phone into my hand. An unfamiliar voice on the other end asked me if he could borrow *FIFA*. I told him I didn't have it, so he asked if he could borrow *Pro Evo*. I also didn't have that.

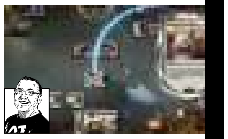
Out of desperation, the stranger asked me what football games I *did* have. I thought for a moment and gave him the honest answer – I had a pre-production copy of *90 Minutes* for the Dreamcast. It's not really the kind of football game you have hanging around if you want to be popular with the lads, but given the consoles I was keeping around, you can probably tell that wasn't my priority. Even if he did have a Dreamcast, *90 Minutes* was a long way from the *Sega Worldwide Soccer* glory days. It's a fairly slow game in which sprinting is barely faster than normal running, the AI players are profoundly unintelligent and the commentary is astonishingly awkward.

I handed the phone back, thinking that this was the end of things. Twenty minutes later I was proven wrong, my incredibly rude flatmate brought her friend to inspect my room for hidden copies of *FIFA*. With nothing to hide, I let him in and enjoyed his disappointment, but in hindsight I should have sat him down for a game of *90 Minutes* so he could experience some extreme disappointment. *

2
1 SEAMAN

>> This month we return to Monkey Island, read the brand-new book, GamesMaster: An Oral History, and discover some retro-themed games for Sony's PS5

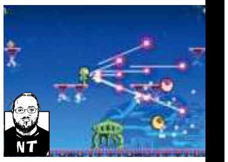
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Magic: The Gathering Arena

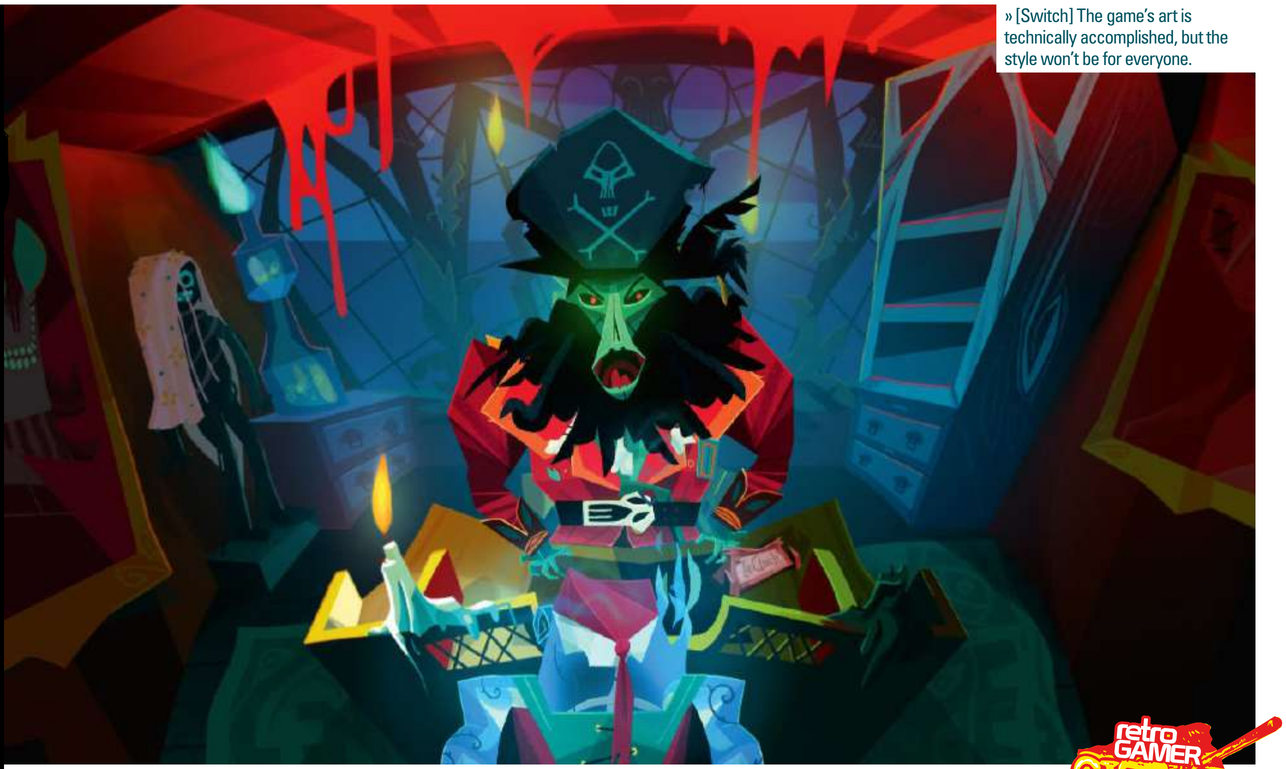
The *Dominaria United* expansion has hit *Arena* so I've been playing it religiously and doing far too much swearing!



NICK

Jetboy

This randomised arcade action game has been a really enjoyable break between *Return To Monkey Island*'s puzzles.



» [Switch] The game's art is technically accomplished, but the style won't be for everyone.

Return To Monkey Island

NO CURSE TO ESCAPE FROM HERE

INFORMATION

» **FORMAT REVIEWED:** SWITCH

» **ALSO ON:** PC, MAC

» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW

» **PRICE:** £22.49

» **PUBLISHER:** DEVOLVER DIGITAL

» **PLAYERS:** 1

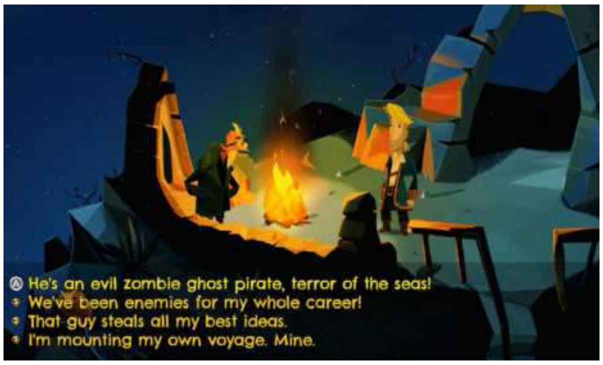
Sometimes, a project sounds too good to be true, and that was the fear when we learned that Ron Gilbert was designing his first *Monkey Island* game in 30 years. Would the dialogue be as sharp? How would the design sensibilities work in the modern age? Was the decision to set the game immediately after *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* a sign that the later games were being discarded? Having played the game, we needn't have worried.

We're not sure how many designers would be bold enough to use a nostalgia-driven sequel to remind players that they're getting older, but well-deserved credit must go to Terrible Toybox for doing so. Good old Guybrush Threepwood has decided that his latest adventure will be an expedition to discover the true secret of Monkey Island, but he returns to a Mêlée Island that has undergone some big changes. Familiar places like the Scumm Bar are inhabited by some new faces, while many of the shops have been shut down.

Our hero's past adventures are only properly remembered by those who were involved – everybody else misremembers them at best and is dismissive at worst, meaning that his reputation is no longer enough to earn him a ship or a crew.

It's very clear that the developer has recognised the changes in the gaming landscape since the heyday of the original *Monkey Island* games. There's a handy refresher that new players and

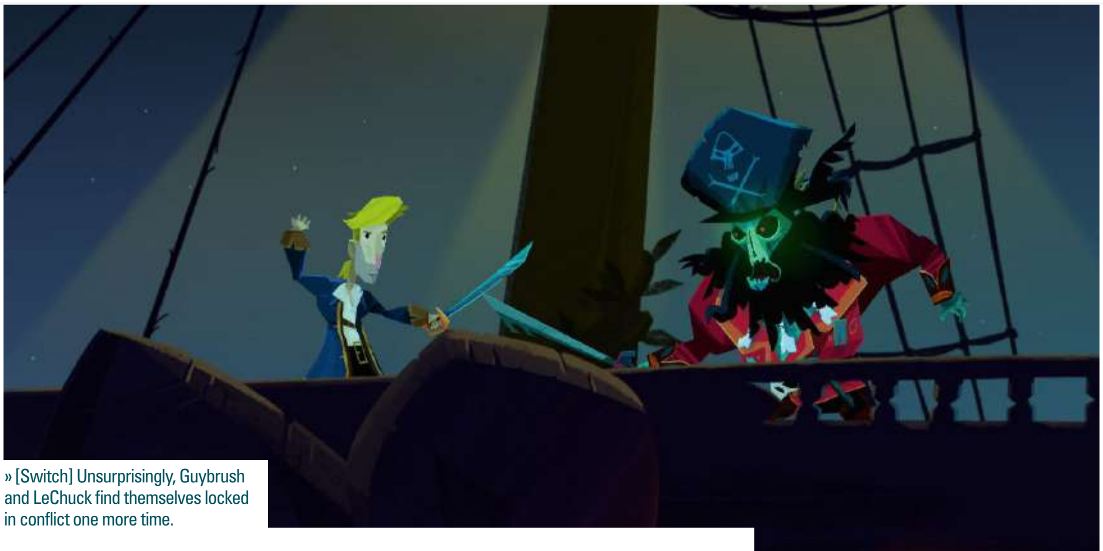
» [Switch] Guybrush starts his adventure in a very familiar place for old fans.



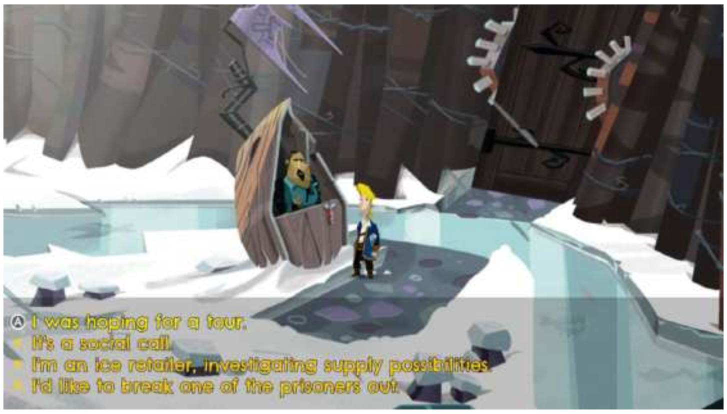
Ⓐ He's an evil zombie ghost pirate, terror of the seas!
• We've been enemies for my whole career!
• That guy steals all my best ideas.
• I'm mounting my own voyage. Mine.

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Return To Monkey Island* is the latest entry in the long-running adventure series, which began with *The Secret Of Monkey Island* in 1990. It's the first new game since Telltale Games' 2009 release *Tales Of Monkey Island*, and the design was led by Ron Gilbert and Dave Grossman.



» [Switch] Unsurprisingly, Guybrush and LeChuck find themselves locked in conflict one more time.



- I was hoping for a tour.
- It's a social call.
- I'm an ice retailer, investigating supply possibilities.
- I'd like to break one of the prisoners out.

» [Switch] Later in the game, the adventure opens up to islands such as Brrr Muda.

forgetful veterans can use to catch up on the characters and events of previous adventures, and while old point-and-click fans may be inclined to use the Switch's touchscreen, the controller is an equally viable option. There are two difficulty modes, with the harder one offering more numerous and complex puzzles, but playing on hard there's nothing particularly obtuse to be found.

In any case, it's hard to get truly stuck as you're given a checklist showing your objectives, every clickable item is highlighted and an in-game hint book offers increasingly direct tips on how to progress. Some players may baulk at the decision to include this, but the hints are spoiler-free and you're never forced to access them, so the challenge of solving a puzzle is still there for the players who want that. What the Terrible Toybox team has recognised is that people valued past *Monkey Island* games far more for their humour than their mechanics, and has wisely chosen a design that ensures the next amusing exchange of dialogue is never frustratingly far away.

Fortunately for fans of the story, the old magic hasn't gone away. The banter between characters is superbly written, with a number of nice callbacks to past games and plenty of toying with the fourth wall, without ever lapsing into lazy nostalgia. The writing is definitely enhanced by the top-notch performances of the game's voice actors, including a star turn from the returning voice of Guybrush Threepwood, Dominic Armato. The music isn't quite as memorable, but does provide suitable accompaniment for your adventure.

If there's anything that is likely to divide opinion, it's the graphics. On a technical level, everything is well-animated and the cutscene cinematography is admirable. The art style is another matter though, as it's quite a departure from the past *Monkey Island* games and a little abstract. We think that it looks great, particularly in motion, but as always art is subjective and it did garner some negative reception when it was first unveiled. It shouldn't be enough to put anybody off the game, but it is likely to provoke a strong reaction one way or another.

All in all, *Return To Monkey Island* is a triumph. The tone and humour of the game are perfectly pitched, and will be enjoyable for both old fans and series newcomers. It avoids many of the frustrations of older point-and-click adventures, and adapts well to the Switch. If you play it on its harder mode and avoid using the hint book, it also offers enough of a challenge that it will last you a good while, especially considering the relatively low price. ✱

In a nutshell

A funny and fair adventure that should satisfy anybody who enjoys a good puzzle, no matter how familiar they are with Guybrush Threepwood.

» Score **92%**

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

My name's Guybrush Threepwood, and I want to be a pirate!

▼ SOMETHING NEW

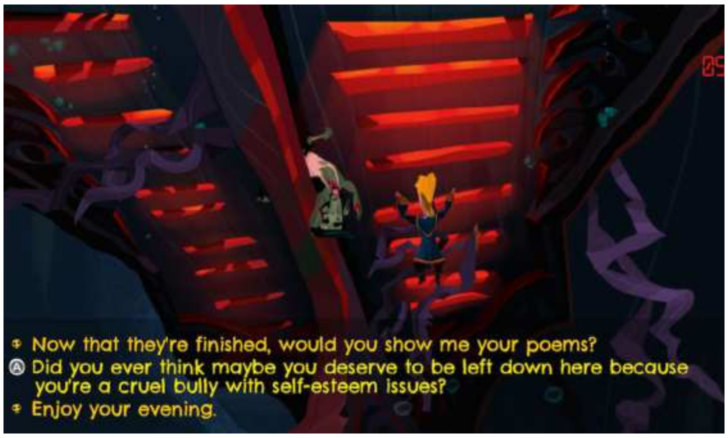
THIMBLEWEED PARK

- What are the alternatives?
- I accept.

» [Switch] Captain Madison and the new pirate leaders are constant thorns in your side.

- You should never have given up being Swordmaster.
- How's the governorship treating you?
- I hope you're not still sore about that thing with the ship that one
- You've come far since I got you your first cushy government job.

» [Switch] There's a lot of appeal in seeing how your favourite characters are holding up.



- Now that they're finished, would you show me your poems?
- Did you ever think maybe you deserve to be left down here because you're a cruel bully with self-esteem issues?
- Enjoy your evening.

» [Switch] The dialogue is amusing throughout, with some wonderful choices that you can make.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

GamesMaster: The Oral History

» Buy it for: £35.00 **» Buy it from:** Online, retail

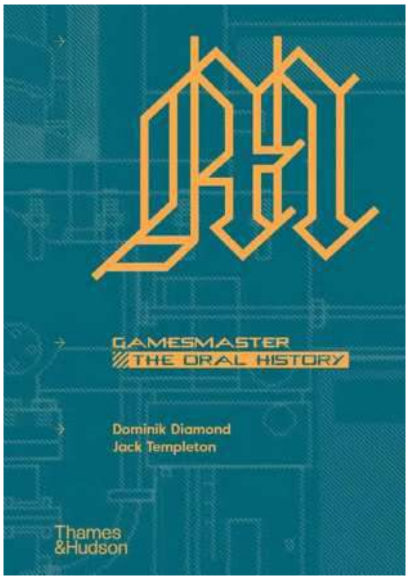
***GamesMaster* was the first – and arguably only – TV show that got videogames right, and this book coincides with the 30th anniversary of the show's debut.**

The story is told through a series of interviews with key players in the show's production, linked together by commentary from Dominik Diamond and edited by Jack Templeton. The number of people involved is impressive, taking in important players from behind the camera including Jane Hewland, Cameron McAllister and Jonny Ffinch to recognisable talents like Dave Perry and Kirk Ewing.

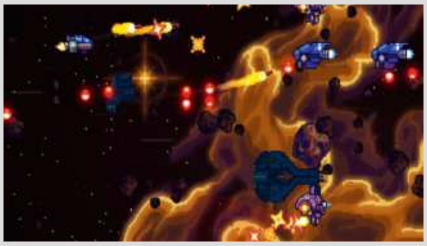
You'd expect plenty of hilarious anecdotes in a book like this, and tales of awful celebrity lookalikes and Rik Henderson's embellished storytelling elicited genuine laughs. The production sketches and photos are great nostalgic inclusions too, and it's fascinating to read TV professionals explaining why GamesMaster was a groundbreaking show in so many respects, especially given the restrictions involved. There's a genuine affection for the show that runs throughout.

However, what makes the book so special is that it doesn't pretend that *GamesMaster* was perfect. The story of series three is as calamitous as you might expect, but you'll likely come away from reading it with a lot more respect for Dexter Fletcher, as he contributed to the story. Elsewhere, it's interesting to learn about how the production team hated the set for series five, and how they recognise that certain elements of the show wouldn't fly today. Dominik Diamond is candid about how ego, insecurity and drugs played a part in influencing his decisions over the years.

Any fan of *GamesMaster* should come away from this book having learned something new, but it would be an entertaining read even for those who never saw the show. In any case, we can't imagine any way to have done it better.



» The book is well presented in general, with a dash of classic *GamesMaster* style.



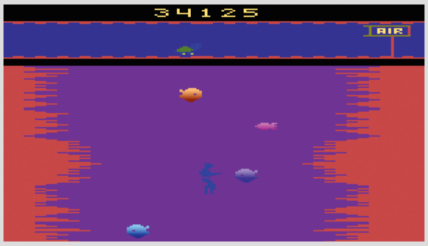
Rick Henderson

» System: PS5 (tested) PC, PS4, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X **» Buy it for:** £6.49+ **» Buy it from:** Online

Despite its budget nature, *Rick Henderson* has plenty to offer. There are different pilots to master, a variety of weapons to experiment with and an interesting scoring system, all wrapped up with a distinctive retro aesthetic. You'll be rewarded for grazing bullets, each ship can switch between three different weapon types: plasma, energy and missile, while your shield can be used to temporarily ram enemies. Sadly, *Rick Henderson* is let down somewhat by its dull enemy waves, unmemorable power-ups and generic-looking bosses. We certainly had some fun with it though and it's hard to argue with its low price point.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **65%**



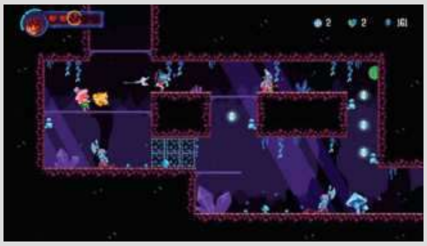
Aquaventure

» System: Atari 2600 **» Buy it from:** atari.com **» Buy it for:** $49.99 (standard) / $149.99 (limited)

***Aquaventure* is a game in which you control a diver trying to pick up treasures from the bottom of the ocean, then return them to a mermaid near the surface, all while avoiding hostile marine life.** The game was originally designed in 1983 but first released in 2005 on the Atari Flashback 2. The $100 difference between the standard and limited edition is mainly found in the custom LED-lit cartridge – beyond that, you get a poster, a patch, a badge, a certificate of authenticity and an eight-page manual. Still, *Aquaventure* is a simple but pretty compelling game that looks rather nice, and is a worthy addition to your library.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **82%**



WitchCrafty

» System: PS5 (tested), PS4, Switch, Vita, PC **» Buy it for:** £9.99 **» Buy it from:** Online

There's a particularly relaxing feeling to this platform game, in which you play as a young witch trying to find the source of corruption taking over the forest. It's a Metroidvania that allows for travel between small, self-contained stages, and it has some particularly nice animation. Unfortunately, *WitchCrafty* doesn't really bring any new ideas to the table and it has some frustrating character movement bugs that will cause unnecessary deaths. This wouldn't be so annoying, but the game handles death inconsistently – so you lose collected items and map progress, but major obstacles you previously destroyed won't reappear.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **55%**

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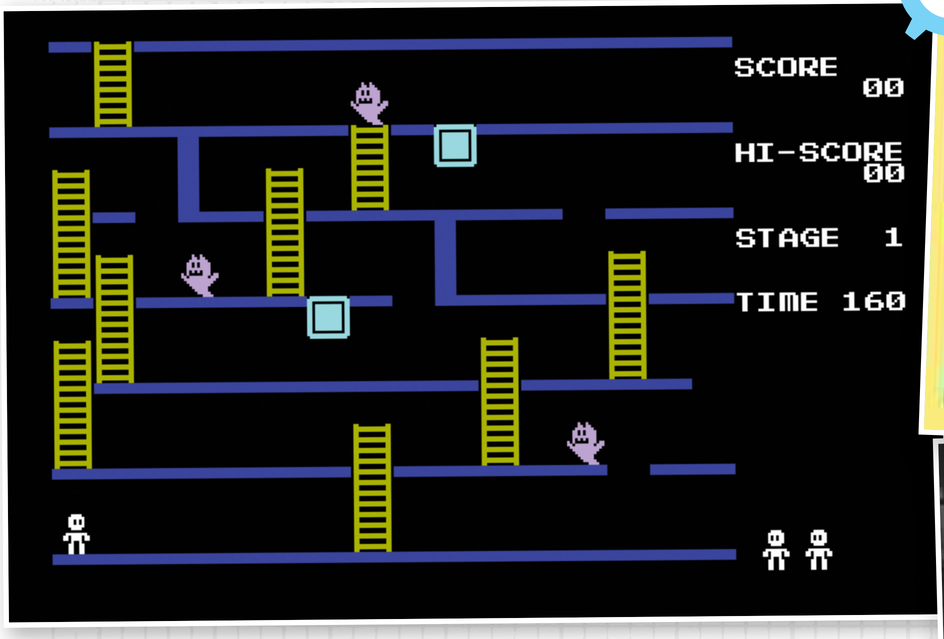
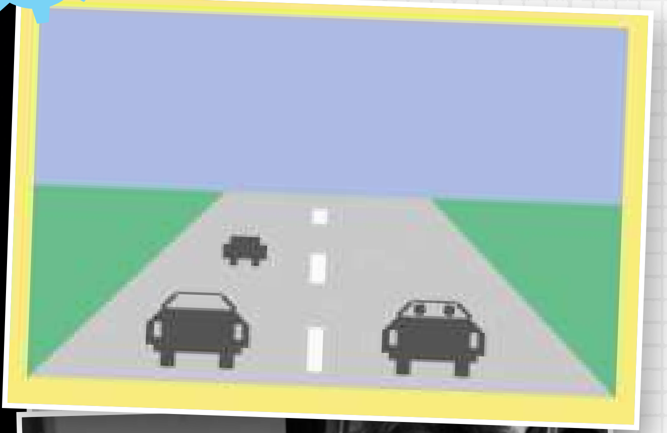
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

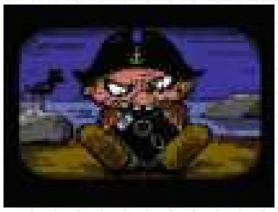
<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



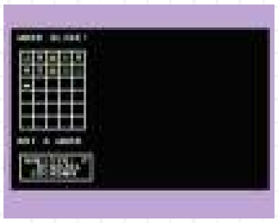


<!--- ALI POULADI (HAPLO) AND LUCA CARRAFIELLO (LUCA/FIRE). --->

<INTRO> THIS MONTH WE BRING YOU AN INTERVIEW WITH THE MOJON TWINS DISCUSSING THEIR LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND REVEALING SOME EXCLUSIVE NEWS. WE ALSO DELVE DEEP INTO SOME DUNGEONS FOR OUR REVIEWS, FROM TOP-DOWN AND FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVES, AND WE START WITH A LOOK AT THE EXCELLENT RELEASES SO FAR THIS YEAR FOR COMMODORE'S PLUS/4. NEXT TIME IT WILL BE THE MSX IN THE SPOTLIGHT AS WE COVER THE MSXDEV 2022 COMPETITION. </INTRO>



<!--- [PLUS/4] PETSCII ART ALSO THRIVES ON THE SYSTEM, AS IN THIS CONVERSION OF SALTY CRACKER BY THE TALENTED JAB/ARTLINE DESIGNS. --->



<MAIN HEADER>

TED TRIUMPHS

<INTRO> WE TALK TO THE CREATORS STILL STRETCHING THE TED CHIP INSIDE COMMODORE'S UNDERDOG, THE PLUS/4 </INTRO>

<BODY> **The Plus/4 is having another good year so far thanks to *Lykia The Lost Island* from Pulsar and Alessio Scanderebech's hybrid board game and computer game, *The Nightland*. Standout titles from TCFS (Tamás Sasvári) are his two C64 conversions: *Bruce Lee Anniversary Edition* (to be published by Psytronik) and *Impossible Mission*.**

Another busy coder is Ali Pouladi (Haplo). "When I was a kid, I used to stand in front of our local computer shop window for minutes and stare at the Plus/4 they had on display," he tells us. With his partner (graphic artist and collaborator Marupka) they now have a collection of over 40 retro machines. "One day I thought, 'Hey, I can learn the C64 architecture and have a go at making a game,' and *Toop* was born out of that," Ali says. *Toop* is also available on Plus/4, along with Ali's newest puzzle game *Tenebra*. "The main inspirations for *Tenebra* were the PC games *Closure* and *Lightmatter*. In these two games stepping into darkness was fatal, but I opted for a more forgiving and relaxing experience by making the dark areas inaccessible. *Portal* was also a source of inspiration. I started thinking about how I could create a similar experience to those games on C64 and came up with the idea of *Tenebra*. I created it all in text mode without using any sprites, with the aim to release it on Plus/4 as well." Is there anything he would change about the Plus/4? "The sound and the lack of sprites. Especially the latter… or I would have released many more games on it." What's next for Ali? "Stay tuned for a new game coming to your Plus/4s towards the end of the year!"

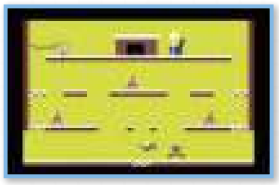
So what recent games does he recommend? "*Alpharay*, *PETSCII Robots* and *Lykia*…"

Luca Carrafiello (Luca/FIRE) asked his parent for a Plus/4 when we was just 13. He converted *Word*

FIVE FUN THINGS

BRUCE LEE ANNIVERSARY EDITION (TCFS)

< The Datasoft game comes to Plus/4, with the physical release renamed *Lee*™ in association with Psytronik, Antstream and Code 10 Digital. />

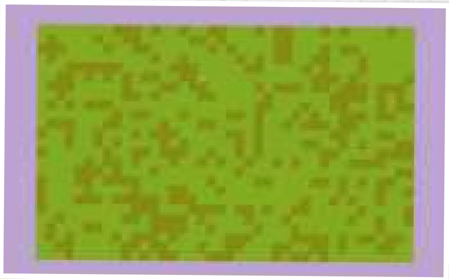


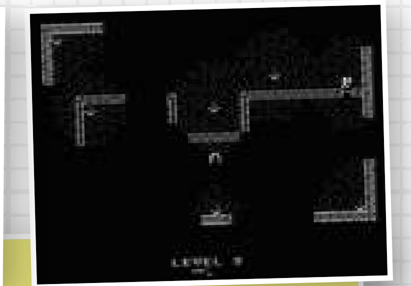
IMPOSSIBLE MISSION +4 (TCFS)

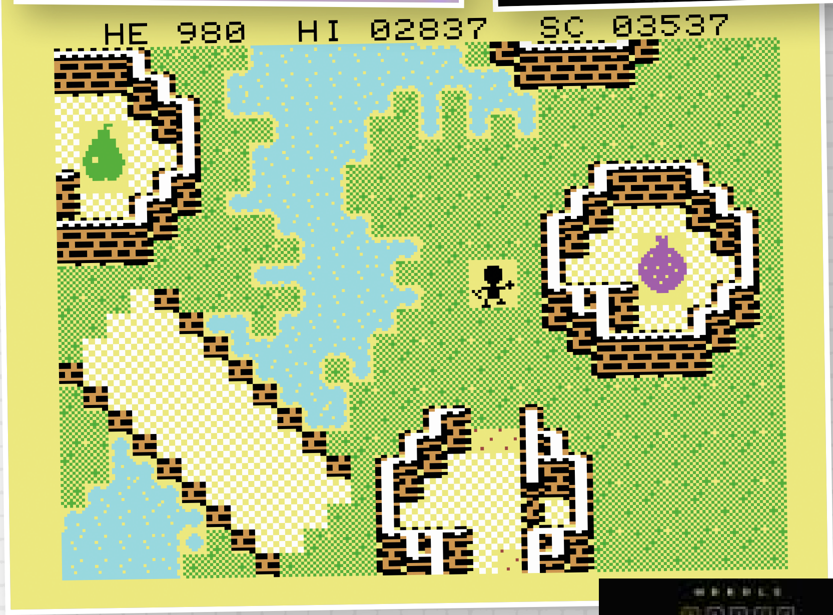
< Another visitor from the C64, with impressive sprite animation. Avoid robots and search the furniture for puzzle pieces to open Elvin's lair. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**





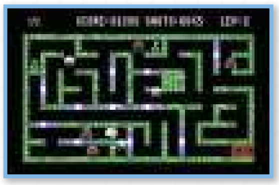


<!--- BOBR GAMES PRODUCED A DUAL C64 AND PLUS/4 VERSION OF THE NIGHTLAND, COMPLETE WITH BOARD, DIE AND COUNTERS. --->

Slide and *Wordle* from C64 to Plus/4 this year and has been highly active as a coder and cracker. "I'm planning a lot of other cracks, intros, tunes and all the other activities related to the scene," he says. "If I find a slice of real life away from the hindrances, trivial or more serious, I will make a new game that is 100% of my own." Is there anything he dislikes about the Plus/4? "If the Plus/4 had got SID and sprites… well it would be a C64. We like our beloved machines for their limitations, trying to overcome them."

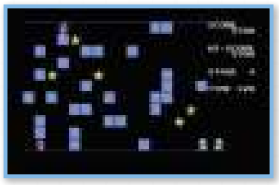
Luca was also keen to praise two fellow Plus/4 fanatics as well. "Stephan 'Mad' Mader has opened new frontiers of coding techniques, and Csabo/LOD is an example of enthusiasm and skill, the true pillar of the entire scene." With so many talented coders around, Plus/4 owners can look forward to much more fun in the future. </BODY>

<INTRO> THE 2022 PLUS/4 RELEASES TO TRY OUT </INTRO>



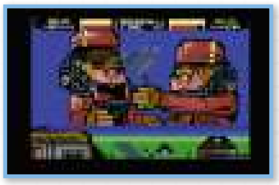
LADY TUT (PROGAME)

<Based on the 1983 C64 game of the same name, manoeuvre through rotating gates and pick up the treasure while avoiding or shooting the enemies./>



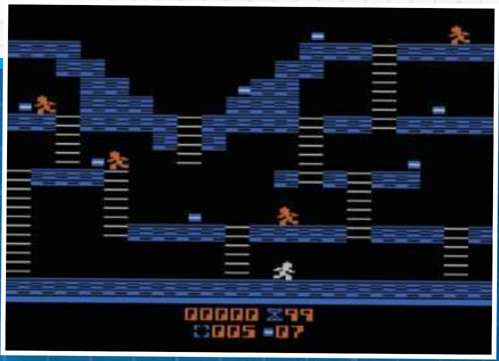
CACORM (INUFUTO)

<The prolific Japanese coder's games have appeared on many 8-bit systems; here you 'surround' the stars with your rope to complete the level./>



GIGANTIC MONSTER (SYSTEM SYNDROME)

<Inspired by *Monstro Giganto*, huge PETSCII monsters battle it out. A new 'dance duel' mode sees the player copying his opponent's moves./>



NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Aquarius:** Following issue 238's coverage, Jitursan announced *Word Chaser*, inspired by C64 title *Randoon* but with words rather than colours. Play the demo at bit.ly/aq-wordtwist/>

<**Amiga:** Check out *Croaker*, a new twist on the classic *Frogger*. It's at bit.ly/croaker-amiga/>

<**Atari:** Many great games launched at Portland Retro Gaming Expo (retrogamingexpo.com), including the officially licensed 2600 port of *Lode Runner* (above). More at bit.ly/loderunner2600/>

<**C64:** *Commodorex* is Commocore's twist on the *Chrome* offline game – allowing you to submit scores online with 64NIC+ and WiC64 cartridges. Find it at bit.ly/commodorex

Dungeons Of Doom from TheStuffMake is a procedurally generated roguelike inspired by *The Binding Of Isaac* and *Legend Of Zelda*. Follow development at bit.ly/dungeonsofdoom and check out his conversion of *New Rally-X*.

You can also see new releases *Knights 'N Slimes* – monteboyd.itch.io/knights-and-slimes – and *Sub Chase 64* senkel64.itch.io/sub-chase-64/>

<**Mega Drive:** Follow @RetroEncoder on Twitter as he converts the *RoboCop* arcade game to Sega's 16-bit console./>

<**PICO-8:** The latest from Paul Hammond includes his brilliant *Demon Attack* conversion, as well as *Invaders2600* and *Pico Frogger*. You can find them all at pahammond.itch.io/

The PICO 1K Jam 2022 took place at itch.io/jam/pico-1k-2022 – challenging creators to make a game in 1024 compressed bytes./>

<**Various: Get** flicker-free vector graphics in *Elite* for C64 and Plus/4 thanks to Mark Moxon. See it in action at bit.ly/elite-flickerfree/>

<**ZX Spectrum:** Gabriele Amore launched *Frantic Pengo 2*, with more block-squashing action. Download via bit.ly/franticpengo2/>

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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CHAMPION CODER

MOJON TWINS

<INTRO> ANGEL AND NA _ TH _ AN FROM THE GROUP TALK ABOUT 8-BIT DEVELOPMENT </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: SPAIN/EUROPE WEBSITE: MOJONTWINS.COM AND MOJONTWINS.ITCH.IO FORMAT: VARIOUS RECENTLY CODED: LALA PROLOGUE (AMSTRAD CPC), ZOMBI MALL (ZX SPECTRUM 48K) DEVELOPING: MK 1 ENGINE (C64) />

<!--- MEET THE MANY TALENTED MEMBERS THAT MAKE UP MOJON TWINS. [FROM LEFT TO RIGHT]: DAVIDIAN, CHEMAN, JOSITO, NA _ TH _ AN, ANGEL (AND RAULICO ON THE PHONE). --->

DO YOU HAVE A CODEBASE/ENGINE?

<na_th_an: We try to design in a way parts can be easily reused later. We have released several engines and frameworks, and some have been widely used. All our NES scrollers have different scrolling engines but share other modules such as player control, enemies, bullets, and collision. We make those modules so you can connect them as if they were Lego.

In January 2010 we thought of making a simple engine – we were continuously having weird ideas and wanted a tool to make them happen. That's how MK1 was born. The funny thing is that every game we designed required new parts to be added. />

ISN'T THE MK1 ENGINE COMING TO THE COMMODORE 64?

<na_th_an: We started 'porting' the engine because we wanted to create a new C64 *Ramiro* game. The intention is to release the engine for free by the end of the year when we have completed an extended port of *Jet Paco* and (possibly) *The Brown Ramiro Game*. />

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE MACHINES TO CODE FOR?

<na_th_an: ZX Spectrum and NES for their purity and simplicity of design. It's always thrilling to attempt to unveil their true potential with capabilities never thought of by their designers. The Amstrad CPC, as it was the machine of so many friends.

<Angel: ZX Spectrum, Amstrad, and NES, because they are the machines I had. I'd love to mess with the Game Boy, but you can't be in everything. />

HOW DO YOU CREATE GRAPHICS?

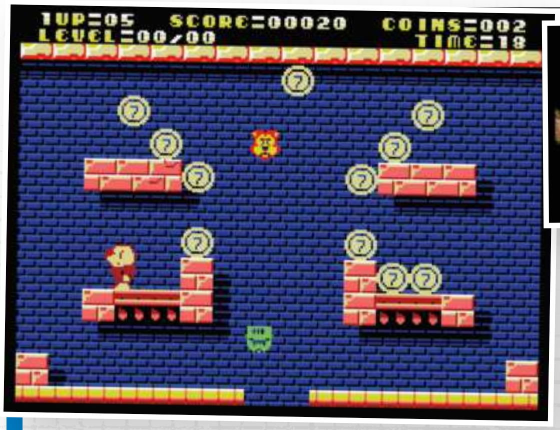
<Angel: Adobe Fireworks and Aseprite. We try to make them new for each platform. At most, we convert with Photoshop and retouch. />

WHAT IS PUBLISHING LIKE?

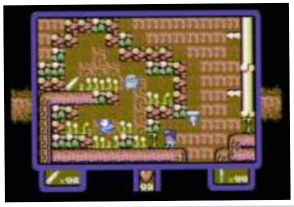
<na_th_an: I personally love small publishers with avid fans at the helm rather than the bigger companies run by businessmen. />

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR DREAM VIDEOGAME TO MAKE?

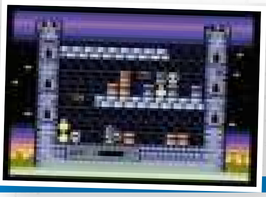
<Angel: An adventure for Spectrum and Amstrad with a comic-book system like *Batman The Caped Crusader*. />



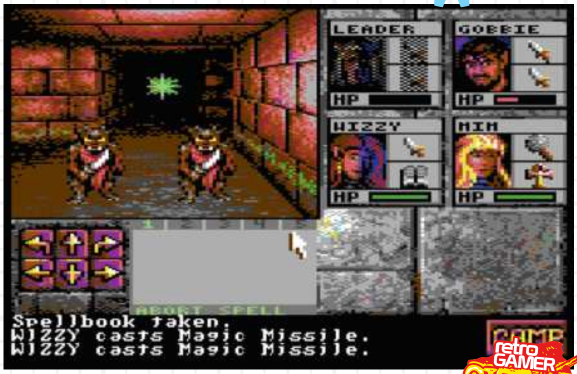
<!--- [MSX] GRABBING COINS IN SUPER UWOL, A GAME WHICH ALSO APPEARED ON MASTER SYSTEM. --->



<!--- [C64] AN EXCLUSIVE GLIMPSE OF JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE NOSE IN THE NEW MK1 ENGINE. --->



DATA BURST



Spellbook taken.
WIZZY casts Magic Missile.
WIZZY casts Magic Missile.

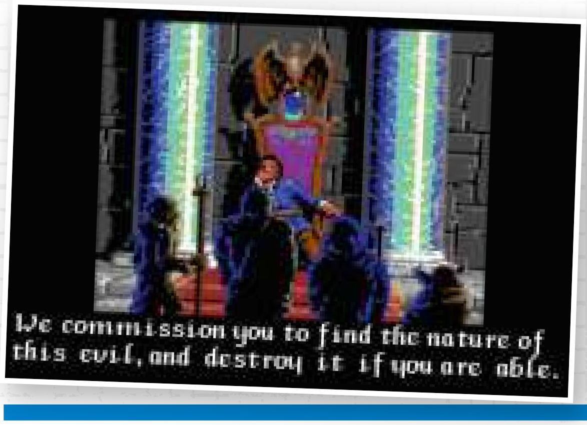
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

<INFO BY: JACKASSER, ILESJ, MIRAGE, TWOFLOWER, VETO, LINUS, ALGORITHM FORMAT: C64 PRICE: FREE DIGITAL DOWNLOAD VISIT: BIT.LY/BEHOLDER64 />

<BODY> **The Lords Of Waterdeep summon four champions to search the sewers for the source of the evil monsters plaguing the city – only to seal them underground with a rockfall!** The classic Amiga first-person dungeon crawler from Westwood has made the transition to Commodore's 8-bit computer remarkably well. Roll your characters, choose their portraits and venture into the dungeons with mouse or keyboard control, clicking on icons to attack and use items. Pull switches, open doors and fight the monsters waiting for you, casting spells and healing when you rest in a camp. One feature added to the C64 version which we've found very handy is a new automap (shown with M), which is drawn as you explore.

The graphics are incredible, from the smoothly animated intro to the detailed walls and enemies. It's also supported by great music and sound effects. The pace is slow, and combat can be very difficult, but it retains so much of the original's atmosphere. The EasyFlash cartridge image can save your game, or it can be saved and loaded from disk; a pre-rolled party is also included for novices. While it may not appeal to everyone, the team has done an outstanding job – with development lasting many years. Another incredible RPG for C64 fans to get their teeth into. </BODY>

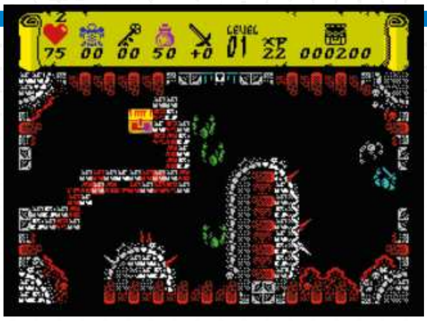
SCORE: 90%



We commission you to find the nature of this evil, and destroy it if you are able.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**


LEVEL 01
75 00 00 50 +0 22 000200

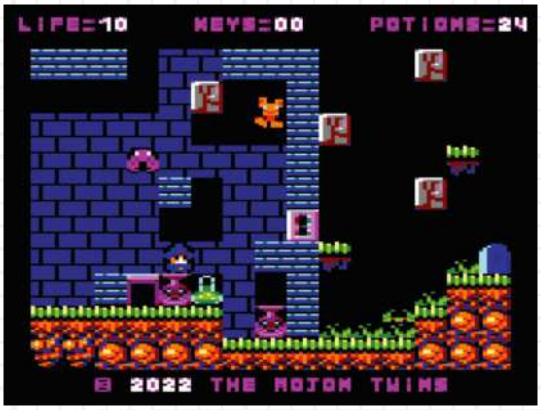
Hakkenkast
Dungeon 1
Minilopretro.com

HAKKENKAST

<INFO BY: MINILOP (MUSIC: YERZMYEY, LOADING SCREENS: KEVIN MCGRORTY) FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (48K & 128K VERSIONS) PRICE: £3.00 OR MORE (FREE DEMO DUNGEON AVAILABLE) VISIT: MINILOP.ITCH.IO/HAKKENKAST />

<BODY> **Four Spellbooks have been stolen, and the Elders Of Eldritch have taught you – the mighty warrior Hakkenkast – a Magic Missile spell to help you enter four dungeons to retrieve the precious books.** This top-down dungeon crawler sees you swing your sword by tapping Fire or holding Fire to unleash magic (costing Mana, with new spells learnt as you progress). Find keys, loot, armour and more to help your quest, and collect continues to resume play. Completing a dungeon gives a passcode to be entered at the start of the next. Excellent graphics portray a twisting, turning route through changing environments, with great music as well. The later dungeons are very challenging, but the well-made gameplay compels you to keep exploring. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%


LIFE:10
KEYS:00
POTIONS:24
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LIFE:01
KEYS:00
POTIONS:17
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LALA PROLOGUE

Lala
prologue
Mojon Twins

<INFO BY: MOJON TWINS FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE DOWNLOAD VISIT: MOJONTWINS.ITCH.IO/LALA-PROLOGUE-CPC-2022 />

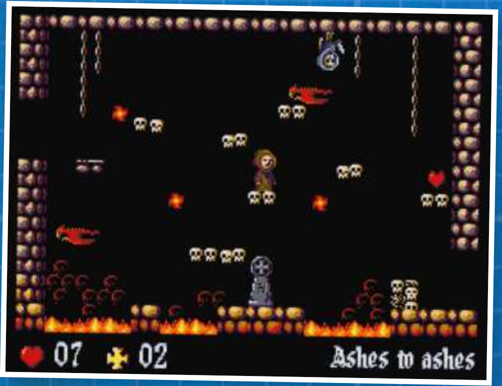
<BODY> **Lala must explore Morgana's academy, searching for the missing ingredients needed for her potions.** Flying enemies and spike traps will drain Lala's life force, but heart-shaped lollipops will help her regain life. Keys must be found to open locks, allowing Lala to access more rooms and continue her quest. This is familiar platform fare from the Mojon Twins, developed in their MK1 game engine. Lala's jump feels quite floaty, and devious screen designs will test your abilities. It looks and sounds good, and this is a lot of fun to play. </BODY>

SCORE: 80%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> AB-ULTRANARWHAL IS TAKING AMIGA USERS TO THE ABBEYS OF THE DEAD WITH HIS LATEST PROJECT </INTRO>

<BODY> **Locomalito's *L'Abbaye des Morts* was inspired by the Spectrum and has appeared on multiple formats, including the recent boxed Atari ST edition from Côté Gamers.** How long until we get this latest version? "I'm looking to release it by the end of this year. It has a quicker development cycle than *Duckstroma* (reviewed in issue 237) which took 18 months. If all goes to plan this will be six months of work," we're told. How closely is it based on the PC original? "The screens and graphics are based on the original release which was open-sourced, with player movement similar to the later revision. A major feature is a brand-new extra campaign of 23 of my own designed screens." UltraNarwhal is also a big supporter of the Scorpion Engine. "I only use the Scorpion Engine as it offers the best performance for the lower spec Amiga users. To make the game's graphics I use GIMP or Grafx2, sound effects are created using LabChirp, game levels are built using Tiled and all running under Windows." Look out for a review in a later issue. </BODY>


07
02
Ashes to ashes

<!--- [AMIGA] THE MIXTURE OF PRECISION PLATFORMING AND PUZZLES IS LOOKING HEAVENLY THANKS TO THE AMIGA'S RESOLUTION. --->

Abbey(s) of the dead
Based on L'Abbaye des Morts by Locomalito
Original
Alternative
2022 UltraNarwhal

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

LICENSED GAMES

Good licences, bad licences, the team has experienced them all

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Total Time
3'24"634
Time
60
Score
0425774
Rival

» [PS3] Not all games with licences are based on TV shows and movies as *OutRun Online Arcade* proved.

After months of speculation, Rare finally revealed that *GoldenEye 007* is making a return to Xbox consoles, as well as Nintendo's Switch. To celebrate this rather momentous occasion, Nick, Darran and Tim have got together to discuss the best *James Bond* game of all time as well as other popular and not so popular licensed games.

DARRAN
So how do we all feel about *GoldenEye 007* being re-released on new consoles?

NICK
I've got fond memories of playing it as a kid, but I won't be going back to it. Not without a sick bag at the ready, anyway.

TIM
I didn't play it much and when I did I was confounded by the controls. The arrow buttons to look around? I was used to twin sticks by that point. Still picked Oddjob though.

DARRAN
The N64 was one of the few consoles Melanie would play on and she loved *GoldenEye*. She was terrible at it though, and you could always tell where she was in multiplayer matches because her character would either be looking at the ceiling or its feet.

» [N64] We're all excited for the return of Rare's game. Except for Nick that is. He's getting queasy just thinking about it.

NICK
Trying to work your way around that controller wasn't always easy, but it was a nightmare in the heat of battle. I also spent a good bit of time gazing at my own shoes.

DARRAN
The multiplayer was amazing, mind. In fact, has there ever been a better *James Bond* game than *GoldenEye*?

TIM
I quite enjoyed *James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire* on the PlayStation 2. That had a fun wee multiplayer mode.

DARRAN
I agree, although the campaign was pretty poor. What was the first licensed game everyone can remember playing?

TIM
On the C64 I played *Transformers*, *Ghostbusters* and *Bruce Lee* – had fun with them for sure. Well maybe not *Transformers*, that wasn't good.

NICK
I'm not sure, but I think it was Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* arcade game. I can remember playing that with my dad, but can't quite say when.

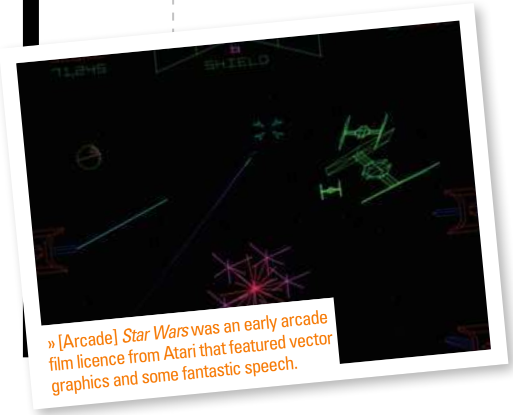
DARRAN
Mine was *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* probably followed by the original *Star Wars* arcade machine, which I thought was mind-blowing. Some good C64 shouts there, Tim. We should also mention the many film and TV licences that Ocean worked on. Does anyone have a favourite? Mine is *RoboCop*.

NICK
Cobra on the Spectrum, it's a far better game than it is a film.

DARRAN
I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure *Cobra* has a 'kill' button. Did you play any of the Ocean licences, Tim?

TIM
RoboCop was pretty good and I also had *Cobra*, but on the 64. *Platoon* was pretty good too.

DARRAN
I used to love licensed games based on films, largely because I've always loved films. The Nineties seemed to be a



» [Arcade] *Star Wars* was an early arcade film licence from Atari that featured vector graphics and some fantastic speech.

ROBOCOP
1UP
011100
ARREST
1.41
OWER

» [Amiga] Ocean was king of the licensed game and *RoboCop* was one of its very best.

good time for licensed games, particularly if you were a fan of Disney. Why do you think that was?

TIM
Better technology, more expertise and the occasional decision not to release a blatant cash grab.

NICK
Yeah, I feel like maybe players were a bit more savvy about them. By that point, it was common knowledge that publishers would sometimes try to use a licence to prop up a duff game.

DARRAN
Speaking of duff games, did anyone else get to play *Fantasia*? Man that was atrocious.

NICK
I never did play that. To be honest, I always assumed it was rare because it was recalled pretty quickly.

DARRAN
Let us talk about licensed sports games. They seemed to explode during the Nineties as well.

NICK
Oh yeah, *FIFA* started in the Nineties and it's crazy to think that the series is now in its final year. You've got *NBA Jam*, EA's *NHL* games, even the *2K* sports games started in 1999. If you broaden it out to motorsports, you've got games like *Daytona USA* and *TOCA Touring Cars* too.

DARRAN
Yes and *technically* the later *OutRun* and *After Burner* games are licensed now, which is the annoying reason why they're all bloody delisted. Licensing is also the main reason the Xbox 360 version of *Crazy Taxi* was pants because all the good music was taken out of it.

NICK
Come to think of it, at this point the *Super Smash Bros* series would probably feel pretty barren with all the external licences stripped out.

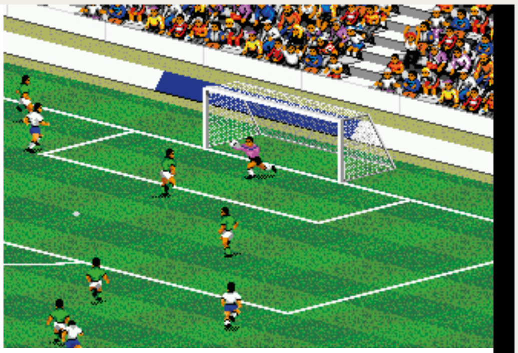
DARRAN
That's a good point, Nick. Does anyone want to hazard a guess as to why film and television licences don't seem to be as popular as they were in the Nineties and Noughties?

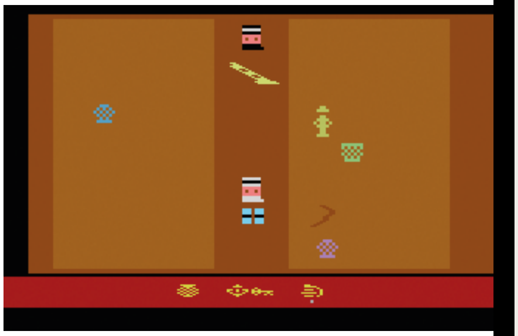
TIM
Well there are nine *Fast & Furious* games by the way. I guess some still use the 'slap a licence on it, it'll sell' adage.

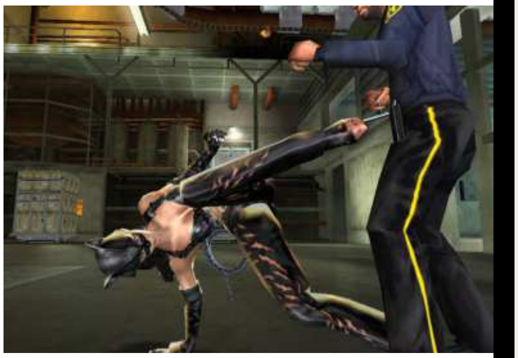
DARRAN
Sod off, Tim! Really?

NICK
I feel like it's hard to capitalise on TV series because of how the model has changed. Series go up on streaming services, people binge them and the buzz dissipates after a couple of weeks. That's probably why you see loads of games based on *The Walking Dead*, because it's been going forever.

DARRAN
To be fair, the *Walking Dead* game on VR is incredible, but most of them are extremely dull and derivative, just like the TV show after season… oh, let's say three. *


» [Mega Drive] *FIFA International Soccer* started off in the Nineties. *FIFA 23* is the last game in the series.


» [Atari 2600] There were a number of licensed games on Atari's first console, including *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*.


» [PS2] *Catwoman* is a good example of a poor use of a movie licence.

» [PS5] Darran's recently completed *Spider-Man Remastered* and had a lot of web-swinging fun with it.

LOST LICENCES

Readers would love these licensed games to return

Martin Watts
Mission Impossible for the N64. It's a bit shonky, but I like the thought of playing the embassy mission in HD.

Paul Darbyshire
Please get me a brand-new 2D *Chester Cheetah* game…

Robin
The Trap Door, but make it slightly easier this time please.

GC
I'll go with an obscure one; *GI Joe* by Konami. An absolutely underrated arcade game. Tons of fun and, I am not mistaken, wasn't even released on consoles to begin with.

ADH Gaming
I'd love the entire *Tiny Toon* Konami games on a collection. All pretty decent games – even the sports games are not that bad. There must be about ten or so games in total they could put in a collection!

Alex79, OK?
I'd love a HD compilation of some remastered 8-bit home-computer movie classics, namely: *RoboCop*, *The Untouchables* and *Batman The Movie*.

S Scott
The Simpsons arcade game. Still a mystery as to why it hasn't returned in some form!

Simon Cowley
The world is crying out for the return of *50 Cent: Blood On The Sand*.

Blair Farrell
Capcom's Marvel games from *The Punisher* to *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* need to be accessible to everyone, not just to those who already own those games or can afford Arcade1Up's machines.

Matt Faul
Shadowrun for the Sega Genesis. It's a fantastic game that's true to the tabletop RPG. It's sad that the current rights holders seem to have no interest in re-releasing the game.

felixthecat
I'll say it before and I'll say it again, *Basildon Bond* is long due for a remake…

DM
Home Alone – you know that SNES game is a classic.

Qphlat
A *Marvel Vs Capcom* collection would be very cool.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

DONKEY KONG 3: THE GREAT COUNTERATTACK

"A lesser-known *Donkey Kong* shoot-'em-up from the Eighties, developed by Hudsonsoft. I feel very fortunate to have found a copy for the NEC PC-6601."

PAID: £300

SUPER MARIO NO SWEATER

"A mega-rare title, a sewing simulator game for the Famicom disk system."

PAID: £250

YOSHI NO COOKIE: KURUPPON OVEN DE COOKIE

"One of the rarest Super Famicom games. Only 500 copies were made as a promotional item for a Panasonic oven in Japan."

PAID: £2000

A MUSEUM OF MARIO LOVE

The gaming shrine dedicated to Nintendo's mascot

BIO

NAME:
Steven Bagley

LOCATION:
Midlands, UK

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
"Priceless to me"

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Super Nintendo

FAVOURITE GAME:
Super Mario World

TWITTER/INSTAGRAM:
@Mario_Museum

ALL NIGHT NIPPON SUPER MARIO BROS

"This is a version of *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, based on the Japanese radio program *All Night Nippon*. It was given away as a prize in 1986."

PAID: £500

We think it's fair to say this month's collector, Steven Bagley from the Midlands, UK, likes a certain Italian plumber. "Throughout the Eighties and Nineties, Nintendo continued to innovate and deliver high-quality games design," he explains. "I have fond memories of discovering *Super Mario Bros 3*, *Super Mario Land* and *Super Mario World* for the first time, and I guess most retro gamers will agree that nostalgia is a powerful thing." Steven's favourite *Mario* game is *Super Mario World* as he feels it "perfectly bridges the gap between *Super Mario Bros* and *Super Mario 64*"; yet his first love was an altogether different type of cartoon videogame star. "I grew up with a Sinclair Spectrum and loved the *Dizzy* games," he says. "They were my first experience of the platform genre and were a huge influence on my gaming tastes." Nevertheless, the young man never looked back after acquiring his first NES and a copy of *Super Mario Bros*.

For several years, Steven has focussed his collecting on his favourite videogame character, amassing a hugely impressive range of *Mario* games, ephemera and more. "I adore lots of Nintendo franchises, but the joy of *Mario* is that there will always be something to collect," he notes. Nevertheless, Steven is a picky collector, not content with acquiring the more common merchandising, as he clarifies. "I always say I'm more than a collector just for the sake of amassing stuff. I've learned a lot about the history of Nintendo and feel in many ways I'm preserving a piece of cultural history and bringing titles from across the world into one single, unique collection." Steven's fascination for the odder elements of Mario merch has led him to some strange items. "I used to own two Game Boy-powered sewing machines," he laughs. "But the oddest *Mario* software I have is a memory card made by Brother called *Super Mario Embroidery World*, along with *Super Mario World* for the Barcode Battler."

Steven's passion for the *Mario* series has engendered an interest in Japanese culture and even a trip to the home of Nintendo back in 2006. What does he think makes the character so enduring? "What I think sets Mario apart is the universal appeal with a history that spans generations. The games also have a much-loved cast of supporting characters, but perhaps most importantly, it's the quality and innovative gameplay which is the hallmark of Nintendo. The *Mario* series has managed to maintain those high standards for almost 40 years."

So, Steven likes a bit of Mario. But can he pass the ultimate Mario test: has he seen the 1994 movie, and if so, what does he think of it? "I remember going to the cinema to see it, and I still have an original cardboard stand from the cinema in my collection! It wasn't great, but I don't think fans cared; it was riding on a wave of huge popularity and, yes, I have *SuperMarioLand* by Ambassadors Of Funk on CD single." Well done, Steven – you passed. *

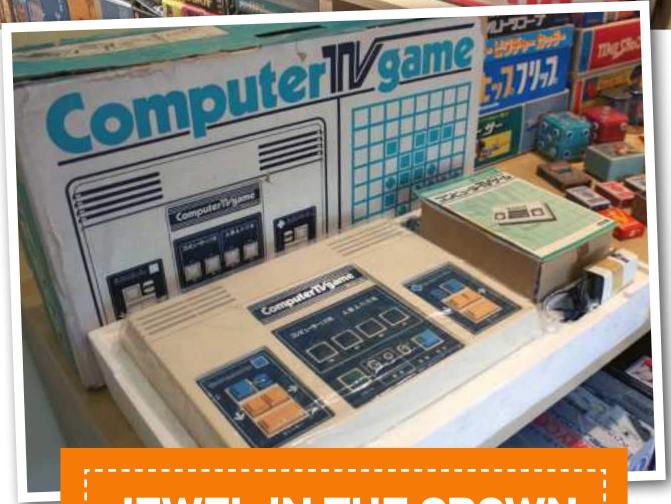
Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

HANAFUDA PLAYING CARDS

"I have several Nintendo card decks dating from pre-WWII onwards."

PAID: £100-£300 EACH



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NINTENDO COMPUTER TV GAME CTG-HC10

- "The rarest of all the Nintendo TV Game systems. Mine is new and in unused condition. It was a lot of money at the time, but I couldn't let it escape."

PAID: £1,600

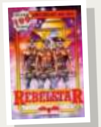
BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

EVERCADE EXP

The latest handheld from the Evercade stable is available for preordering at various places, including Funstock, for **£129.99.** With its improved features and 18 built-in games from arcade legend Capcom, it looks like a solid upgrade over the original handheld.



REBELSTAR

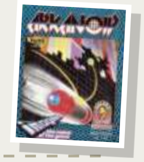
The Spectrum original of *Rebelstar* has increased in value over the years and now sells for between **£8** and **£10.** Expect to pay a couple of quid more for the Amstrad CPC version.

THE LAST NINJA

The Last Ninja is undoubtedly System 3's most famous IP, and while cassette versions tend to stealthily slip away for **£15-£25,** the disk versions are much more expensive.

WIZ 'N' LIZ

You can wescue wabbits for a measly **£10-£25** on the Sega Mega Dwive with other versions wetailing for a vewy weasonable **£10.** Bwilliant. [Please stop – Ed]



ARKANOID

While not exactly common, the original full-price release of *Arkanoid* published by Ocean Software under its Imagine label sells for **£5-£10** on the ZX Spectrum, while its *Hit Squad* re-release bounces for a similar price.

ELECTROCOP

Loose carts of this high-voltage Lynx game sell for a decent **£10.** However, if you're after boxed copies, be prepared to get charged a lot more.

ICE HOCKEY

Like many Atari 2600 games, prices of this sports sim are relatively low, with boxed copies selling for **£9-£12.** With most sales emanating from the US, however, watch out for that postage.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

This Master System game is one of the more common on the system and rarely sells for more than a tenner, even boxed and in mint condition.

PUCHI CARAT

If you are hankering after some cute puzzle action, then this PlayStation version of *Puchi Carat* is a bargain, with the European game rarely selling for more than **£6** posted.

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC II

A boxed copy of this RPG sequel will likely set you back 100 gold pieces with another 50 for its expansion. Just want to play? You can currently get both on GOG.com for a heroic price of just **£2.19.**

HOW MUCH?!

ULTIMA

On the theme of classic RPGs, an eBay auction of the very first *Ultima* just wrapped as **Retro Gamer** went to print. A cool **£1,750** got the happy bidder an Apple II game disk, cover and reference card. Rumours of Lord British going to see his bank manager remain unconfirmed.

Prices correct at time of print

ACTION-PACKED

David Crookes reveals the inspiring impact of Amstrad Action

One day I found myself writing for a publication called *Presto News*. It wasn't a magazine associated with a now-defunct chain of British supermarkets. Rather, it was an A5 photocopied Amstrad CPC-focussed fanzine edited by Matt Gullam who also ran a public domain library.

I'd ordered a few disks jam-packed full of games from him and his quick responses led to a rapid flurry of communication. After a few letters back and forth, I found myself grappling with a desktop-publishing package called PowerPage, writing articles and laying out pages. I also heralded my first foray into journalism with the cringe-worthy boast of writing *PN*'s "brightest and informative new column".

Flicking through its pages today, I can see that I reviewed some PD goodies, among them a game called *Driller* (not the one by Incentive, I must add) and a splendid *Tetris* clone called *Drehdriss*. I also saw fit to mention *Space Froggy*, a game from 1990 created by Gary Scott that I still enjoy to this day!

But I must make an admission. My brief time with *Presto News* was only intended to be a mere stepping stone. As fine a tome as it was, I already had my eye on something else: a column in a magazine that influenced me like none other (sorry to everyone else).

That publication was *Amstrad Action* and I bought my first copy in 1990. I can still picture the cover which grabbed me – a fierce-looking *Turrican* adorning issue 57 – and I can practically recall every article from the joystick round-up to a review of *Pipe Mania*.

Then again, I read it from cover to cover about six times over while eagerly awaiting the following issue. And so it went on. Each month, I'd run to the newsagent around the time the next issue was due in the hope it would have arrived early. It felt like I was catching up with friends and it provided a constant for me during tough times at school. I would feel safe and informed while engrossed in those pages.

At the same time, I would also feel inspired. Editor Rod Lawton and staff writer Adam Peters would urge readers to be creative with their CPCs. Adam in particular would show how things were made (including *AA* itself) and he spent five issues covering Big Red's development of *Wild West Seymour*, delved into the creation of fanzines, explained how to make music (appearing on the cover and popping his tune on the covertape) and wrote guides to setting up PD libraries.

I'd devour all of his words and feel a burning desire to do something. I wanted to be like Adam and possess the same sense of humour – to be brave enough to review *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* and include a hilarious made-up interview with Cannelloni and Matisse or get fellow staffers to dress up for a random panto. Then, one day, I woke up and reckoned the time was right.

I was 16 years old and I picked up the phone to Dave Golder, editor from issue 96. "Gis a job," I may as well have said. And not just once. I called him again and again and again and, you know what, he was always polite. He took the calls. He listened and he encouraged me and I began to learn lessons.

And so I took the creative path. First *Presto News*, then *WACCI*, then my own fanzine which I ran for a year. I set up a tiny PD library, dabbled lamely with some software of my own, and one afternoon the phone rang. It was Dave. "Would you like to write the fanzine column for *Amstrad Action*?" he asked. And I danced around the room!

> "I would feel safe and informed while engrossed in those pages"
> **DAVID CROOKES**

Now, reading those columns today, makes we wince just as much as that intro in *Presto News*, but I will be forever grateful to *Amstrad Action* (and Dave). The magazine kick-started my career in journalism that has seen me working for the regional press and a host of tech and videogame magazines for more than 25 years. It instilled an appreciation of print and the written word and it made me understand that computer magazines are as much about entertainment as information.

At the same time, the magazine introduced me to loads of great games and to many people I'm still in touch with today. What's more, if I ever feel lacking in inspiration, I'll flick through the pages or take a look at an odd issue or two online. It's enough to get the fire in my belly burning once again. ✱

DRAWING INSPIRATION

Other things that made a scene

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
The fanzine, *Artificial Intelligence*, primarily focussed on public domain offerings for the CPC and it fuelled my fascination for homebrew games.

DEMOS
I was blown away when I first set eyes on Logon System's *The Demo* in 1990. It showed what the CPC was capable of.

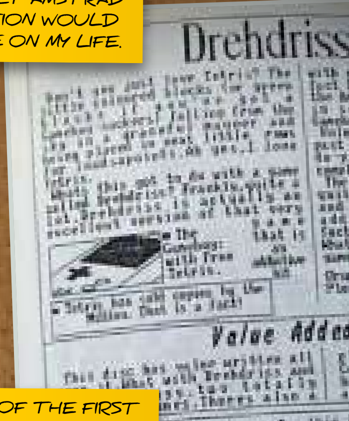
THE FRENCH
Amstrad Action shed light on the many original CPC games being made in France. I have a lifelong love of all-things French.

THE ROYAL MAIL
My enthusiasm only rose once commercial companies abandoned the CPC. I was forever sending disks and SAEs to fellow sceners.

AA COVERTAPES
Without *AA*, my games library would have been far poorer. Full games included *Elite*, *The Blues Brothers* and *Titus The Fox*.

AMSTRAD
IT'S WA
WAGGLERS
The inside story...

ALTHOUGH I COULDN'T PUT THIS ISSUE DOWN, I DIDN'T REALISE HOW MUCH OF AN IMPACT AMSTRAD ACTION WOULD HAVE ON MY LIFE.



ONE OF THE FIRST GAME REVIEWS I EVER WROTE. THAT IS A FACT!

ACTION TEST
PRINC
BRODERBUND/DOMARK
38 AMSTRAD ACTION

AMSTRAD ACTION
ALSO ON DISK!
Further reading
PRESTO NEWS
PRESTO NEWS
PRESTO NEWS
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
CPC
SIMPLY STUNNING!
EXCLUSIVE
AMSTRAD ACTION
PRINCE OF PERSIA
VERDICT
95%

ADAM PETERS SAID AA'S PUBLISHER BANNED HIM FROM APPEARING ON THE COVER AGAIN AFTER THIS!

I ADORED CPC FANZINES AND ENJOYED THE PASSION WHICH OOZED FROM EACH PAGE.

AMSTRAD ACTION LASTED FOR 117 ISSUES AND I MADE MY DEBUT IN ISSUE 105. DAVE GOLDER WOULD SEND ME THE FANZINES.

THIS REVIEW OF PRINCE OF PERSIA IN ISSUE 69 OF AMSTRAD ACTION PERSUADED ME TO PART WITH MY POCKET MONEY.

I WANTED A GX4000 CONSOLE AFTER READING ABOUT IT IN AA. I EVENTUALLY GOT ONE IN 2009!

MAGAZINE MEMORIES

Readers reveal their favourite reads

nrXic
EGM's balanced take and celebration of all games is what turned me into a multi-platform gamer.

jasha
Possibly a little left field, but it'd be *The Micro User*. Taught me a lot and had some truly excellent type-ins. After that, *Your Sinclair*, because they took nothing seriously.

James Harvey
So many, but *CVG* was amazing and affordable on little pocket money!

MVG
Zzap!64 hands down, especially the diary of a game articles that inspired me to become a programmer. Jaz Rignall's amazing writing and of course the brilliant artwork by Oliver Frey. Such an amazing mag.

Metal Jesus Rocks
PC Gamer magazine for sure. I bought every single issue for years and I still cherish my collection of old issues today.

Mike Mika
I saved up my allowance to get *Video Games* every month from a local magazine stand. I learned about the business of games, who made them, and how they were made. I pored over every page for years. I still have an issue on my desk at this moment. Missing an issue was devastating.

ZenoEvil
Crash. The best thing about owning a Spectrum in 1987. Hit the perfect balance between depth and accessibility. And Oli's artwork was sublime.

SDC
Official UK PlayStation Magazine. The demos were a total game changer, the articles and reviews great to read… the overall presentation pretty close to perfect.

Matthew Tuthill
GamePlayers. I really miss the humour in games journalism. Not sure when it got so damned serious.

James Cullen
Sega Power was fantastic. Informative and hilarious.

Sloanysoft
Your Sinclair by a country mile, it was ace and still influences my sense of humour today.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

THE NES BOOK

A WATERY DELIGHT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Nick's reminiscence of *The Ocean Hunter* in issue 238 left me all dewy-eyed with nostalgia. Not because I played the game decades ago at Sega Park, but because I spaffed more than £20 on it six months ago in Lanzarote. There are two *The Ocean Hunter* machines on the main strip in Lanza's Puerto Del Carmen. Time has been kind to one of these cabinets, while the other is limping along with blown-out speakers and a screen which has the yellow tinge of cigarette-addled wallpaper. Either way, consider this a holiday recommendation to Nick, but also a query about the history of *The Ocean Hunter*. Having never encountered it until this year, I'd love to know if **Retro Gamer** has discussed this merciless slaughter of marine life at length in a previous issue. It was excellent fun and feels like a real oddity in the lightgun genre.
Kind regards,
Kevin Fullerton

17 25
MIN
MAX

» [Dreamcast] Darran couldn't get an image of *The Ocean Hunter*, but *Sega Marine Fishing* is another Sega game with a watery theme.

We're glad you enjoyed the mention of *The Ocean Hunter*, Kevin. Darran's never heard of it, but if there's an opportunity for a bigger piece we'll certainly consider it.

STAR LETTER

LOST LICENCES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've recently been excited by the news of *GoldenEye 007* coming back to contemporary consoles and I hope to be playing it again soon. It got me thinking, though – why is there not more effort to restore licensed games? Granted I know money is going to be an inevitable barrier, but surely the sheer size of the videogame market means that this is an effort worth pursuing? Not seeing *Snatcher* on the Mega Drive Mini 2 was disappointing, but not unsurprising and I wonder how many other great licensed games will never see the light of day going forward.
Regards,
James Baker

Glad to hear we're not the only ones excited about the return of *GoldenEye*, James. While money is always going to be a barrier, never say never. After all, if titles such as *Jet Set Radio* and *Scott Pilgrim* can be brought back from licensing hell, anything is possible.

Yeah, we're riding high on a smooth stream of supersonic sounds!

» [PS Vita] Licensed music was the big hurdle in bringing *Jet Set Radio* back.

SHELL-SHOCKED

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
While birthday shopping for my nephew, I was surprised to learn that the *TMNT: The Cowabunga Collection* is rated 12. Since then I've seen similar harsh ratings on assumedly kid-friendly games, such as a 16 for the *Spider-Man* games on PS4/PS5. I recall that long before I turned 12, I was playing *Mortal Kombat* on the Master System and remain (relatively) unaffected. Do you think that the age ratings system is still effective and appropriate, or is it due an overhaul?
Best wishes,
Matthew Bull

We're guessing there are concerns that very young children will try and copy what they see in-game, but honestly, your guess is as good as ours. We'll try and find out more.

1UP LEO 4
02
2UP MIKE 9
00
TURTLES IV
TURTLES IN TIME

» [PC] Does anyone else feel games like *The Cowabunga Collection* should have a lower age rating?

» Darran's game collection can often change on a whim. He's most recently been focussing on Wii games.

COPING MECHANISMS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
After reading this month's section from Darran called Consumed By Collecting, I felt the urge to write in. Your words resonated with me, as I do exactly the same thing. I have many games here, never played, but I love wandering around the car boots and markets or being on eBay with the thought that today, I may find the ultimate game. If it helps lift your depression just a little bit, you go for it. I've added a photo which shows just a small part of my collection.
Cheers,
Pete Shilling

Dear Darran,
Thanks so much for your recent article on depression in My Retro Life. Depression is an awful invisible illness from which I have suffered most of my life. It was like reading about myself and I just wanted to say that you should

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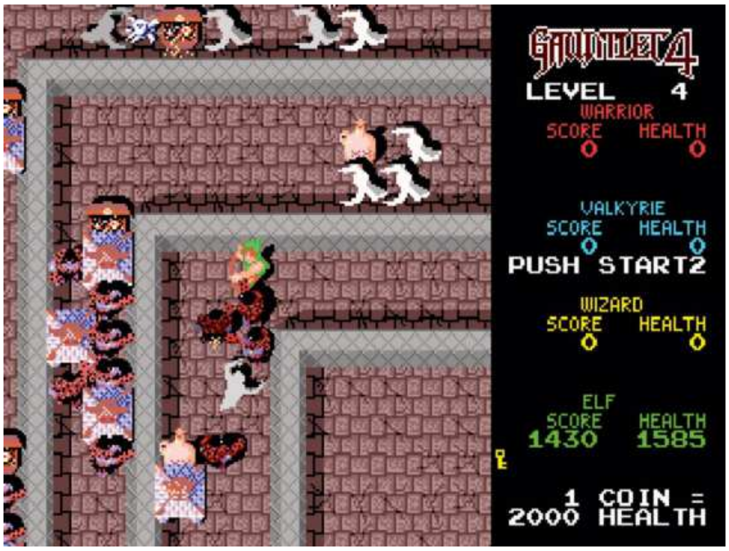

» [Mega Drive] John feels *Gauntlet IV* on Sega's Mega Drive is better than the arcade game and we're inclined to agree with him.

never feel guilty about your coping strategies. People will always criticise when they have no idea what it's like to suffer the way you do. Keep smiling and I wish you good health for the future and to your obviously supporting family.

Yours sincerely,

Kelvin Courtenay

We had a lot of letters and responses about Darran's Consumed By Collecting article, so we're pleased it resonated with so many of you. Thanks for the kind words.

THINKING ALOUD

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

The Retro Revivals section in your latest issue (237) certainly brought up a few thoughts. *Gauntlet IV* – is there an arcade conversion out there that has actually bettered the arcade machine more than this version? *Ghosts 'N Goblins* (and its sequels) – you want to know something? I think these games are crap. They are too tough. There, I have said it.

Keep up the good work,

John Ebbs

We understand why some don't like the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* games, but we've always enjoyed them, John. We can't think of a better version of *Gauntlet*, either.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The PS5 club

Nick and Darran both crumbled and acquired PlayStation 5 consoles recently. The bad news is that their wallets are both feeling a little lighter, the good news is that you can expect PS5 reviews in the magazine on a more regular basis. Nick's been enjoying the upgraded version of *Final Fantasy VII Remake* while Darran has been playing *Spider-Man Remastered*.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Evercade release?

PressPlayonTapeNL
The *Codemasters* and *Oliver Twins* collections are my favourites. They bring me back to the days of the Commodore 64. I've big hopes for the C64 cartridge.

Santi Velasco
Another old fart here, and those two cartridges [above] give me precisely that same vibe. I am also pretty excited to find out what next year has in store for the C64.

Jason
The *Codemasters Collection 1* easily. Just *Sensible Soccer* alone makes it a must have. That game has only been bettered by its sequels. Then you have *Cannon Fodder, Super Skidmarks, Mega-lo-Mania.* Just great game, after great game.

Martin Dewar
I'm so tempted to pick up an Evercade. Was eyeing one up just last week!

Stuart Gipp
The *Renovation Collection 1*, especially considering what the *Valis* series costs on Switch. I'm a big fan of the *Oliver Twins Collection*, personally; the closest we've ever come to a proper *Dizzy* collection, and it's a crying shame that it's out of print.

Zocker Omi
Indie Heroes 1 – so much variety, games that are hard to get otherwise, some special Evercade versions and a lot of love.

Wondering Monitor
Haven't had a chance to try *Renovation Collection 1*, but so far I've enjoyed the *Gaelco Arcade 1*. Playing new (to me) games like *Biomechanical Toy* and *Alligator Hunt* was fun.

Erik Welleweerd
Indie Heroes Collection 1! I discovered so many new classics! Would love to play them on a real console.

jgkspsx
Atari Arcade 1 for the many fine hours of *Gravitar* and the many other fun games. *Lynx 1, Piko 1, Codemasters, Atari 2, Renovation 1, Oliver Twins, Mega Cat 2, Morphcat 1, Gaelco 1&2, Jaleco 1 & Data East 1* arcade and console are all right up there.

Ianhobbies
Renovation Collection 1 is definitely a solid one!

retro GAMER

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Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

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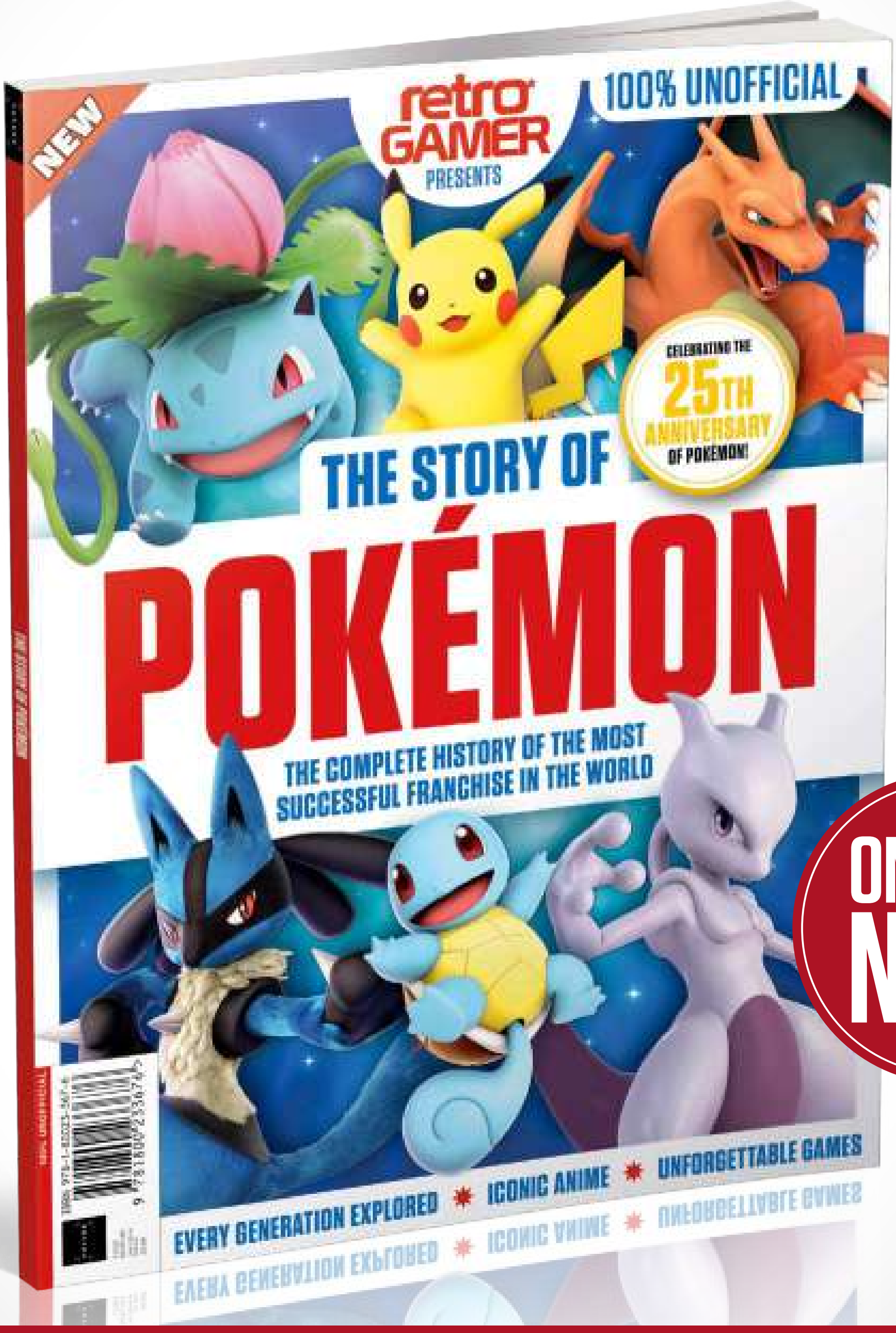
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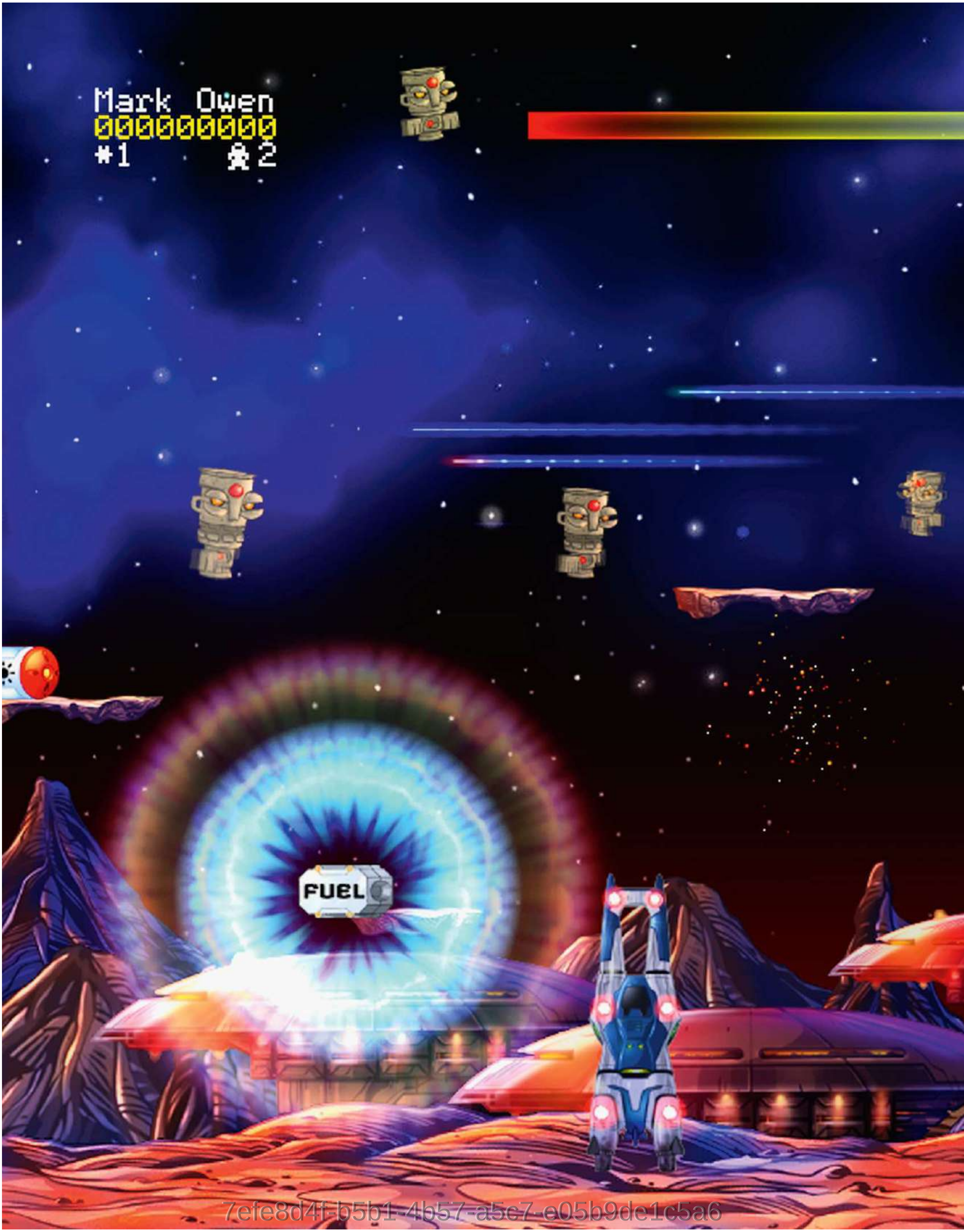
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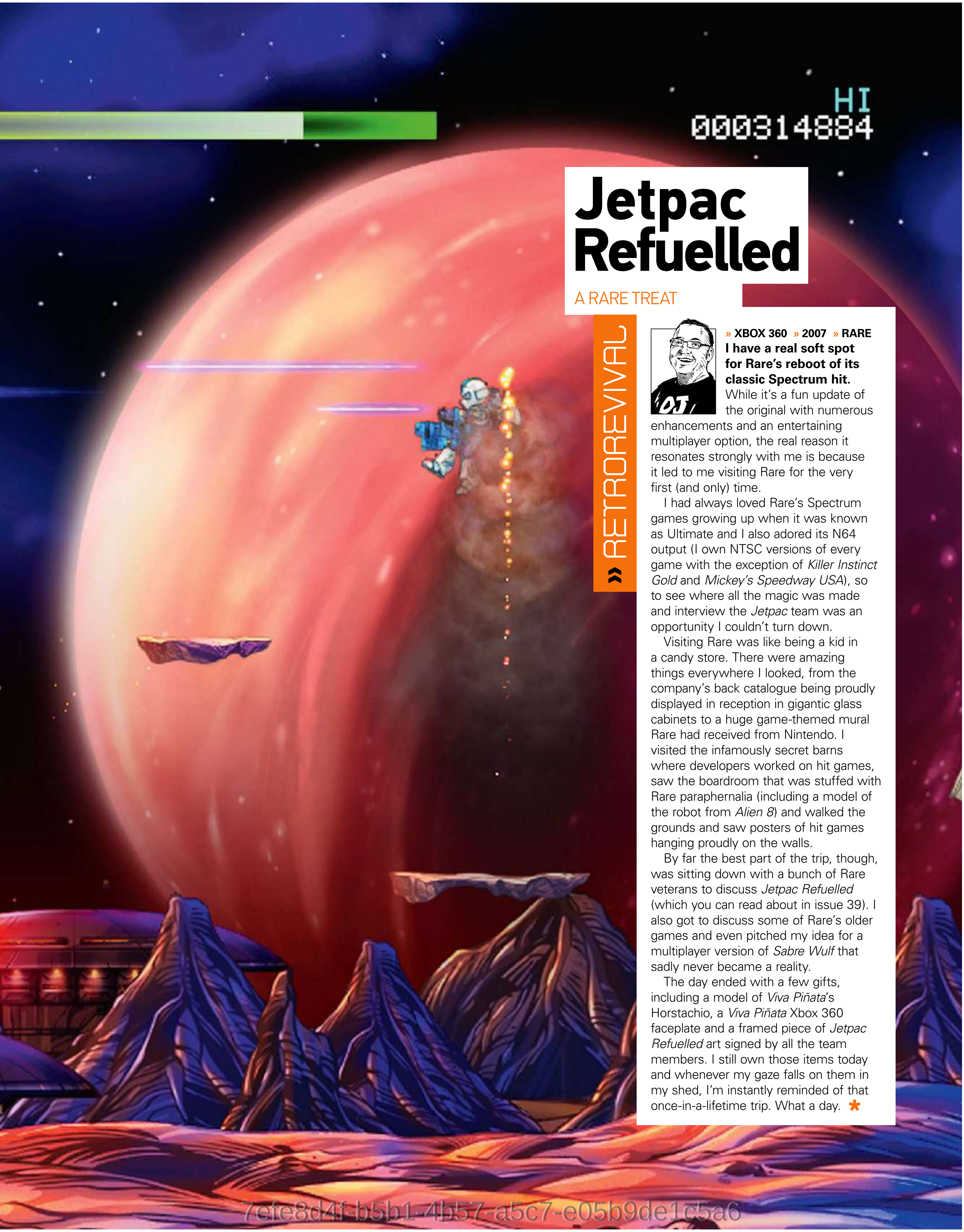


Jetpac Refuelled

A RARE TREAT

» XBOX 360 » 2007 » RARE

I have a real soft spot for Rare's reboot of its classic Spectrum hit. While it's a fun update of the original with numerous enhancements and an entertaining multiplayer option, the real reason it resonates strongly with me is because it led to me visiting Rare for the very first (and only) time.

I had always loved Rare's Spectrum games growing up when it was known as Ultimate and I also adored its N64 output (I own NTSC versions of every game with the exception of *Killer Instinct Gold* and *Mickey's Speedway USA*), so to see where all the magic was made and interview the *Jetpac* team was an opportunity I couldn't turn down.

Visiting Rare was like being a kid in a candy store. There were amazing things everywhere I looked, from the company's back catalogue being proudly displayed in reception in gigantic glass cabinets to a huge game-themed mural Rare had received from Nintendo. I visited the infamously secret barns where developers worked on hit games, saw the boardroom that was stuffed with Rare paraphernalia (including a model of the robot from *Alien 8*) and walked the grounds and saw posters of hit games hanging proudly on the walls.

By far the best part of the trip, though, was sitting down with a bunch of Rare veterans to discuss *Jetpac Refuelled* (which you can read about in issue 39). I also got to discuss some of Rare's older games and even pitched my idea for a multiplayer version of *Sabre Wulf* that sadly never became a reality.

The day ended with a few gifts, including a model of *Viva Piñata*'s Horstachio, a *Viva Piñata* Xbox 360 faceplate and a framed piece of *Jetpac Refuelled* art signed by all the team members. I still own those items today and whenever my gaze falls on them in my shed, I'm instantly reminded of that once-in-a-lifetime trip. What a day. *

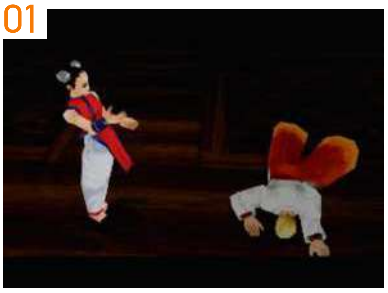
ENDGAME

PlayStation
餓狼伝説
WILD AMBITION

FATAL FURY: WILD AMBITION – XIANGFEI'S ENDING

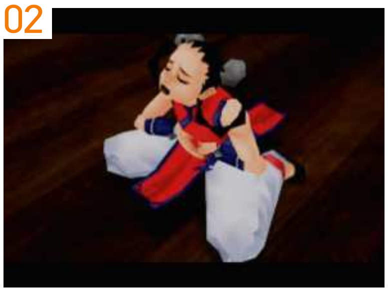
» Back in the late-Nineties, SNK's wildest ambition was to transfer its popular 2D fighting game franchises into the world of polygons. This was certainly not the realisation of that ambition but Li Xiangfei, a newcomer to the series, did achieve her wild ambition by beating the final boss. Let's see what happened once she'd taken out the toughest fighter in Southtown.

01



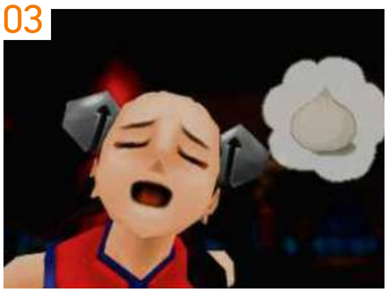
» We don't know how Geese Howard finds time to be a criminal overlord and a martial arts expert. Maybe it's an impossible balancing act – Xiangfei is dusting off her hands, having beaten the seven bells out of him.

02



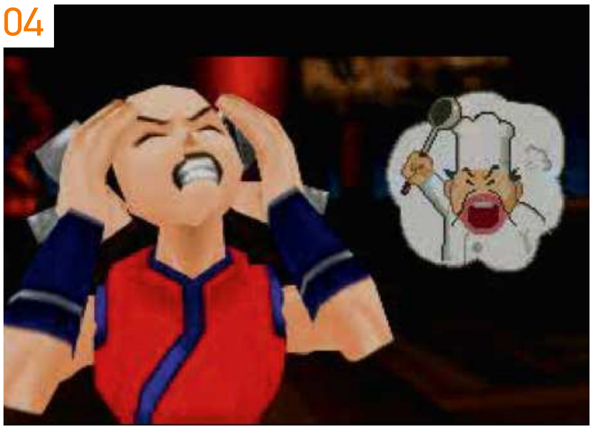
» Of course, fighting is pretty intensive physical work, especially when you're fighting an SNK boss. Xiangfei's a pretty big eater, and now her stomach gives an almighty rumble, reminding her to refill the tank.

03



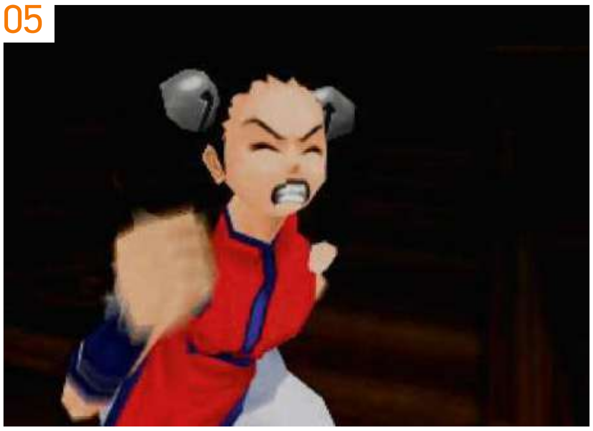
» Her mind turns to hot, filling meat buns. When she goes back to her uncle's restaurant, where she is employed as a waitress and bodyguard, she's definitely going to have her fill of the delicious treats. Oh yes.

04



» Oh no! Xiangfei's uncle has invaded her thought bubble to berate her, not only for eating him out of house and home, but also for sneaking out to take part in a fighting tournament – something that he had expressly forbidden her from doing.

05



» With no better option to take, Xiangfei starts running as fast as she can, fleeing from her mental depiction of her angry guardian. We're not wilfully misinterpreting this for comic effect – this is what actually happens in the game. Seriously.

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